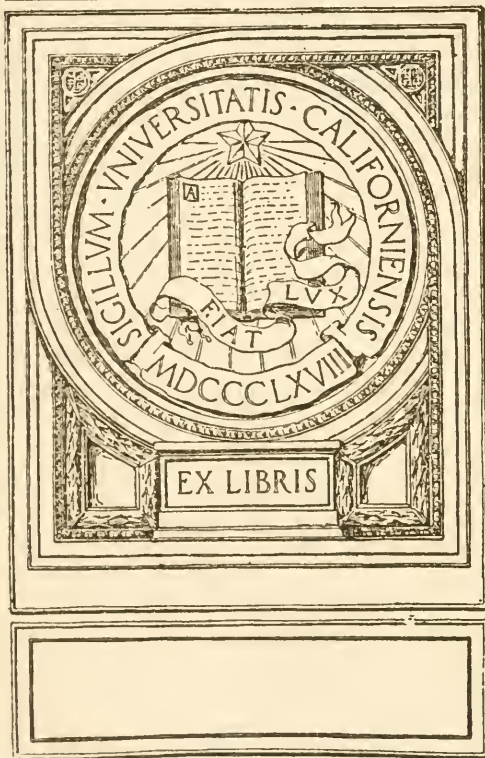


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JOSHUA MARVEL.

LONDON:

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JOSHUA MARVEL.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF 'GRIEF.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
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1871.

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JOSHUA MARVEL.



CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AT HOME.

A HAPPIER party was never assembled within four walls than is now gathered together within the four walls of Mr. Marvel's kitchen. That it is Christmas-eve is proclaimed by the two little hoops which hang from the ceiling, circled by coloured Christmas candles; and that the kindly influence of the time has fallen in full measure upon the wood-turner's house may be read in the faces of George Marvel and his family and guests. Sarah Marvel, whose place in this history is but a small one, has grown into a comely young woman; and, indeed, the four years which have elapsed since Joshua's departure have changed all

his friends for the better. Those of them who were young when he left are no longer boys and girls, except in their hearts, which are as young as ever, and which are pulsing with love for the absent hero. Not to be absent for long now; for Joshua is coming home. They cannot tell the exact day of his arrival; it may be a week yet, or a month; but the sails of his ship are spread for dear home. So, as they sit round the fire, there is a happy light in their eyes, and they look at each other and smile, and laugh musical little laughs.

‘It is more than four years ago,’ said George Marvel, ‘that one night as we were sitting round the fire, as it might be now, Josh said all of a sudden, “I should like to go to sea.” Those were the very words he said—“I should like to go to sea.” And it came so sudden-like, that mother there began to cry. “So you want to be a sailor, Josh?” I asked. “Yes,” he answered; “a sailor first, and then a captain.” Do you remember, mother? And now my boy is coming home a man; and here we are this happy Christmas-eve, talking of him, and thinking of him, and hoping to see him soon after the New Year. Said mother that night, “Suppose Josh is shipwrecked, what

would you say then?" What would I say then? What *did* I say then? I said that Josh wasn't going to get shipwrecked, and that there's more danger on the land than on the sea. And I was right, I was; and mother wasn't.'

Mrs. Marvel smiled contentedly at the reproof, and nodded in confirmation of her husband's words.

'And when Mr. Praiseworthy Meddler came to see us for the first time,' continued Mr. Marvel, 'he said the very same thing that I said about the dangers of the sea. And talking of Mr. Meddler, here he is, I do believe; and that makes our party complete.'

The last words had been suggested by a great stamping and puffing outside in the passage; and presently the door opened, and Praiseworthy Meddler, covered with snow, stood in the entrance.

'A merry Christmas to you all!' he said, peeling off his glazed coat. 'No, no, my lasses, don't come near me; you'll spoil your pretty ribbons.'

But the girls would not be denied, and clustered round him, assisting him to take off his coat, and to shake the snow from his cap and hair. A pleasant figure he was to look at as he stood there, his honest face beaming with health

and pleasure, encircling the waists of Ellen and Minnie, who nestled to him as confidently and lovingly as if they were his daughters. A sprig of mistletoe hanging over the door caught his sight, and he stooped and gallantly kissed the girls, who pretended resistance, and sprang laughing from his arms. Then he shook hands all round, and taking the seat that was waiting for him near the warmest part of the fire, remarked that the snow was two inches thick on the pavement, and that it was coming down heavily still. It reminded him of a great snow-storm by which he was overtaken in a cruise in the north. That, of course, led to entreaties for a snow-story; and the Old Sailor, in his homely way, told them a story of icebergs and polar-bears, which kept them entranced for nearly an hour, and which was all the more delightful because it ended happily.

The story being concluded, they talked noisily and merrily as to what they should do next in honour of Christmas. In the midst of the conversation, Ellen, who was sitting next to Dan, felt her hand tightly clasped. Looking up, she saw upon his face a listening expression of such painful intensity that she asked him, in a whisper, what he was listening to. He put his finger to

his lips, and told her—with a strange abstractedness in his manner—that he was going out of the room, and that he wished her to come with him without attracting attention.

‘We shall be back presently,’ said Ellen to Mrs. Marvel, as she assisted Dan with his crutches.

When they were in the passage, she felt that he was trembling, and she anxiously asked if he was unwell.

‘Not bodily,’ he answered; ‘I want to look in the street.’

They went to the street-door, and, opening it softly, looked out. The snow was falling fast, and the unpretentious houses, covered with their white mantle, looked surprisingly quaint and beautiful. A man, who passed on the opposite side of the way as they opened the door, was the only sign of life beside themselves in the street. The man slouched onwards, and dragged his feet along the pavement in a brutish kind of way, tearing a black gash in the pure white snow, out of sheer wantonness as it seemed. It looked like a desecration.

‘Ellen,’ said Dan, when the man was out of sight, ‘I would not tell my fancies to any one but you. I am not happy. All last night I was dreaming of Joshua.’

‘That was good, dear,’ said Ellen.

‘It was not good, Ellen. My dreams were bad ones. They were too confused and indistinct for me to remember them clearly. But the impression they left upon me was that Joshua was in danger—I cannot tell in what way or from whom. I did not hear a word of the story Mr. Meddler just told us. I was thinking of I don’t know what—and all of a sudden, Ellen, I fancied that I heard Joshua’s voice.’

‘That is because he is so near us.’

‘Near us? Yes. He is very near us; nearer than you imagine.’

‘How do you know, dear?’

‘I feel that he is; and strange to say, Ellen, the feeling does not seem to bring me pleasure.’

‘O Dan!’

‘It is so, Ellen; I cannot help it. That Joshua is near us, I am certain. See: is there anybody in the street?’

Ellen looked up and down. No; there was no person to be seen, and she said so.

‘How beautiful the night is, Dan!’

‘Yes, like fairyland, almost,’ said Dan. ‘It hurts me to see that black track on the other side, where the man was walking. Did you notice how

he slouched along? Look at that shadow at the end of the street. Is it the same man, I wonder?’

The shadow lingered for a few moments, as if undecided which road to take, and then disappeared again.

‘Dan, dear,’ whispered Ellen, ‘you said that you would not tell your fancies to any one but me.’

‘Well, Ellen?’

‘May I whisper something, my dear?’ she asked very tenderly.

‘Yes.’

‘Would you not tell them to Minnie?’

She was supporting Dan, and his hand was round her neck; a nervous twitching of his fingers told her that her question was a momentous one.

‘Dear Ellen,’ he answered in an agitated voice, ‘I do not think I would—at least just yet—because—because——’

‘Because what, dear?’

‘Because I am not sure, Ellen,’ he said, with a sob which he strove in vain to suppress. ‘Do not say anything more, dear. My heart is very sad.’

She obeyed him, and kissed him, and then, with a lingering look at the wondrous white outlines of eaves and roofs, and at the wondrous

white carpet with which the earth was clad, they closed the street-door and reëntered the kitchen. There they were greeted with the news that Basil Kindred was going to describe and read a play to them. The play which Basil had selected was Shakespeare's *Tempest*, with which none of them was acquainted but Minnie and Dan. Minnie clapped her hands in delight.

‘We will all have characters,’ she said. ‘You,’ to her father, ‘shall be Prospero. You,’ to the Old Sailor, ‘shall be Stephano. You,’ to Ellen, ‘shall be Miranda; and I will be Ariel. What a pity it is that Mr. Fewster is not here!—he should be Caliban. If Joshua were here, he should be Ferdinand.’

‘Who is Ferdinand?’ asked Ellen.

‘Ferdinand is a prince, and is in love with Miran——no!’ Minnie exclaimed suddenly and impetuously, the blood rising into her face, ‘he should not play Ferdinand; he should not play at all. Look at me. I am Ariel.’

With a swift motion, she unloosed her hair and let it fall around her shoulders. Bewitchingly graceful and bewitchingly beautiful, she bent in obeisance to Prospero, and said with a happy inspiration,

‘Do you love me, master?’

And he, partly in accordance with her pretty conceit and partly from fatherly affection, placed his hand upon her head and answered,

‘Dearly, my delicate Ariel.’

Then, motioning her to be silent, Basil Kindred, book in hand, commenced to tell the story, reading passages now and again in illustration of the beautiful fancy, and giving appropriate vocal distinctness to each character; so that his hearers could understand without difficulty who it was that was supposed to be speaking. He was in his happiest humour, and he lingered lovingly upon the theme. The fooling of Trinculo, the brutishness of Caliban, the tenderness of Miranda, the majesty of Prospero, the daintiness of Ariel, were all faithfully portrayed; and his audience followed the course of the story with eager delight. When he had given utterance to that grandest of poetical images,

‘We are such stuff

As dreams are made of, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep,’

he paused, and a deep silence fell upon the room, a silence that was broken by Dan exclaiming,

‘Hark! a knock at the door!’

Was it the magnetism of love that caused their hearts to flutter with joy—that caused Mrs. Marvel to rise tremblingly and say that she would go and open the door? But her limbs failed her, and Minnie, crying, ‘I will go!’ ran out of the room. They below, listening in a state of strangely-anxious expectancy, heard Minnie ask, ‘Who is there?’ and heard her open the door. Almost at the same moment they heard a cry of joy, followed immediately by a sharp cry of pain. They ran upstairs and saw Minnie kneeling in the snow, supporting on her bosom the head of a man dressed in sailor-fashion, and pressing her lips to his neck, from which the blood was flowing. The pure snow was crimson-stained; and Mrs. Marvel, in an agony of fear falling on her knees by Minnie’s side, looked into the face of the wounded man, and recognised the features of her sailor-boy just returned from sea.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOG AND HIS MASTER.

UPON that same Christmas-eve Solomon Fewster sat in his room a moody unhappy man. He was alone ; but if angry thought could have found palpable shape, the room would have been thronged with ugly forms. He had refused the invitation which Mrs. Marvel had given him to join the Christmas party, simply because, when she invited him, she happened to say something in joyful tones of Joshua's expected return. The mere mention of Joshua's name was sufficient to inflame him ; and he had at once refused her in a lofty manner, saying that he had another engagement for the evening. The Lascar had done his work well. There is no death for jealousy : it sleeps, but it never dies. And the Lascar had been careful that even the temporary bliss of forgetfulness should be denied to his master. Less force of cunning than he was endowed with would

have served his purpose with such a man as Solomon Fewster.

The good influence of the time did not touch Solomon Fewster's heart. He was completely engrossed by two sentiments—love for Ellen, hate for Joshua. The very circumstance that upon this Christmas-eve he had wilfully deprived himself of the painful pleasure of being in Ellen's company he laid to Joshua's door. Every happy face he saw that day deepened the hate he bore to Joshua; for if it had not been for that absent enemy, he would have been as happy as the best of them. Once during the evening he went into the open space at the rear of his house, and saw his neighbours' windows lighted up, and heard sounds of merriment issue from the rooms. 'Who is it that prevents me from being as happy as they are?' he muttered. 'Who is the cause of my remaining here to-night, fretting my heart out, instead of sitting next to the girl that I love more than my life?' He unlocked the gate in the rear of his premises, and strolled along the narrow lane into which it opened. The houses in the lane were mere hovels, yet there was not one of them that was not brilliantly lighted, and the echoes of laughter and singing floating from

their walls denoted that care had been sent to the right-about for that evening, at least. The sounds were so displeasing to him that he returned to his room, and resting his face in his hands, raised up the picture of Ellen, fair and bright and beautiful. He was a calculating unfeeling man ; and if it had so happened that there had been no obstacle to the smooth course of his love, he might have remained so to the end of his days, and might never have suspected that there were points in his character which would not bear too close a scrutiny. But the means by which we are brought to a knowledge of ourselves are oftentimes very strange. The majority of us go down to our graves without suspecting that there are powerful forces hidden within us, which, had opportunity for display been allowed them, would have materially altered the tenor of our lives, whether for good or for evil. Solomon Fewster's love for Ellen was the most ennobling feeling he had ever experienced. His hatred for Joshua, and the thoughts and desires prompted by that hate, were the most villanous. It is strange that the hate which disgraced him, not the love which ennobled him, should have made him conscious of his defects. It was that very hatred that brought to

him the knowledge that he was not a good man ; and that caused him to reflect that, if his love were returned, it would be the means of making him better. His thoughts were taking this direction now, and he was still sitting with his face resting in his hands, when he was startled by the sound of the gate being violently dashed aside. He remembered that he had forgotten to fasten it. Before he had time to rise, the latch of the door was lifted, and the Lascar glided in like a white spectre. With a strange feverishness of manner, the Lascar turned the key in the door, and at the same moment stooped and listened, holding up a warning finger as a caution for Solomon Fewster to be silent. He remained in that position for two or three minutes ; then rose upright, and drew a long breath.

‘What now?’ demanded Mr. Fewster angrily, and yet with a consciousness that the Lascar had sufficient cause for his abrupt entrance. ‘What thieves’ trick have you been up to to-night, you dog ! that you run in here as if the police were at your heels?’

‘They are not,’ said the Lascar, shaking the snow from his clothes, dog-like ; ‘and that’s a good thing, master, for you and for me.’

‘For me, you dog! You dare to say that!’

‘I forgot to close the gate,’ said the Lascar, taking no notice of Mr. Fewster’s exclamation. He went out, and having locked the gate, reëntered; and, seeing a bottle on the table, said, ‘What’s this? Rum?’ He did not wait to be invited, but helped himself freely, and spread his cold hands before the fire. ‘I am numbed to the bone. It’s precious cold being out in the snow all day. I didn’t hope to find you at home, master. I thought you would be enjoying yourself like a gentleman. I ran in here, finding the gate open, not knowing where to run. It is snowing fast—that’s one comfort—and my footsteps will soon be filled up.’

All the while he spoke he was busily occupied warming his fingers and blowing on his knuckles.

‘Now, explain the meaning of all this,’ said Mr. Fewster.

‘Give me something to eat first, master. I haven’t tasted food since the morning.’

Mr. Fewster pointed to the cupboard; and the Lascar took bread and meat, and ate swiftly and ravenously.

‘My service to you, master,’ he said, glass in hand, ‘and a merry Christmas.’

When he had emptied the glass, he threw a knife on the table. It was a clasp-knife, and the blade was open. There was a triumphant demonstrativeness in the action that instantly attracted Mr. Fewster's attention. He saw blood upon the blade—blood scarcely dried. Whose blood was it? A mist floated before his eyes. It was there but a moment; but in that moment a picture presented itself to him in the midst of a lurid cloud—a picture of a handsome sailor, smitten by an assassin's hand, falling to the ground. Then the figures were lost in a glare of bright blood and bright snow; and they, in their turn, were lost in black shade. Although the vision lasted but a moment, it produced the curious effect upon him of having been enveloped in darkness for a long time; and the sudden awakening to consciousness caused him to shade his eyes with his hand, as if the light in the room were too strong for him. Awake again, the Lascar's familiar action and bearing smote him with a sense of danger. The instinct of self-preservation whispered to him that his good name might be imperilled by farther association with the man. It was clear that the Lascar had done a desperate deed—a deed which, although he shuddered to think of it, had perhaps

removed his enemy from the scene. But if so, it was murder. The merest whisper, the faintest breath of suspicion, would be his ruin, not only with the world, but with Ellen. He would pay for services—yes; but he would take no risk. It behoved him to be wary.

‘They’ve had a merry party down yonder,’ said the Lascar, with a motion of his head in the direction of Mr. Marvel’s house. ‘I made certain you were there, master. I’ve been hanging about the street all night in the cold. I’ve been on the watch; shall I tell you for whom?’

‘No; I want to know nothing,’ replied Mr. Fewster, measuring his words carefully. ‘Understand me once and for all. Whatever you do you do on your own responsibility; and I will in no way be associated with it or with you. If you presume to associate me with any acts of violence on your part, I wash my hands of you. Nay, more: I will set those upon you who will not let you escape easily.’

‘I understand you, master,’ said the Lascar, without the least show of resentment. ‘But go on; you have more to say. I’ll wait till you’ve done.’

‘You dog, you! You break into my house as

if you had a right here ! You tell me, as if I were interested in knowing, that the police are at your heels, and that you are afraid of your very foot-steps being tracked ! You have the presumption to say that it is a good job for me that it is not so ! You throw down this knife before me with blood upon it ! What is it to me whose blood it is, or what crime you have committed ? What if it were to be discovered that you had rendered yourself liable to the law, and then had been seen to come here ? If I did my duty, I should go for a policeman, and hand you into his charge, and so be rid of you.'

The Lascar listened without the slightest sign of discomposure. He even nodded approvingly as he said,

' There's only you and me, master. You wouldn't speak so if anybody else was by. Don't fear ; I know what you mean well enough. There's no chance of our misunderstanding each other, though you're a better actor than I am, and that's a fact. Rest you easy. No one saw me come here ; and no one shall see me go out. As for the police, I know as well as you that it would suit your game as little to set them on me as it would suit my game for them to be set on. But

you're right in threatening me with them. It belongs to your part; for you are master. And it belongs to my part to take what you say kindly; for I am dog. I am satisfied so long as I get enough to keep me; and I'm not greedy, as you know.'

Solomon Fewster was extremely disconcerted by the Lascar's coolness. It proved to him that he was in the Lascar's power, and that the Lascar knew it. He was disconcerted also by the conviction that forced itself upon him, that the Lascar measured his indignation at its proper worth. But he could not belie his nature. It was impossible for him to be straightforward; even in his villany he was compelled to be cunning. He would take care that he committed himself as little as possible by word of mouth. He was burning to hear what the Lascar had to tell, but he would not ask. He drew his breath hard, and it was with difficulty that he restrained his impatience during the long pause that followed; for the Lascar was as determined as he not to be the first to break the silence. At length, feeling that he was being mastered, he turned wrathfully upon the Lascar, and questioned, 'Well?'

'Well!' was the quiet answer.

‘If you have nothing more to say, you can go.’

‘I have something more to say, but I am waiting for permission to speak.’

There was an assumption of insolent humility in the Lascar’s tone; and Mr. Fewster bit his lip as he said, ‘Your tongue’s your own; I can’t stop you.’

‘Thank you, master;’ with a cringing expression of satisfaction for the concession. ‘Since I was employed in my present service—I mean, since a certain night when a kind-hearted gentleman gave me a flower, the leaves of which I have kept carefully in paper, so that I shouldn’t forget what I had to do—I have been more watchful than ever in the task I had set myself to perform. I have been better able to do that than I used to be, because the same kind-hearted gentleman has generously supplied me with money, so that I have had all my time at my own disposal. He also supplied me with information. The task I had to perform was to revenge myself upon Joshua Marvel for stepping between me and my affairs, and for doing me injury. A little while ago the gentleman told me that Joshua Marvel was expected home soon; and then I determined

that not a night should pass and find me lagging. Not only my hate, but my faithful duty to my master, made me determined in this. I set myself to watch for the return of the sailor Joshua; and during my watch I discovered a curious thing. I discovered that the gentleman in whose service I am appeared very often in the street I was watching, and that he was in the habit of lingering there late at night. He never did anything else but look up at the bedroom-window of a certain pretty girl, whose shadow I have often seen on the blind; and he never went away until the light in her room was extinguished. I was careful that he should not see me, for it was no business of mine; and I know when I ought to keep in the background. Besides, I admired him for it; for I knew that he loved this girl, and that Joshua Marvel stood in his way. Regularly every day I went to the docks to see if the Merry Andrew—Joshua Marvel's ship—had arrived; and as good luck would have it, the ship came in this very morning. When I learnt that, I went back to my watch in the street the gentleman is so mightily fond of. I knew that Joshua Marvel wouldn't be able to get away from his ship directly it got into port; and I guessed that it was more likely than

not that he wouldn't let his people at home know of his unexpected arrival. No ; he would surprise them. It would be so pleasant on Christmas-eve to break in upon them suddenly, and be petted and kissed, especially by one——'

'The devil take you!' cried Solomon Fewster fiercely, grasping the table with such force that it trembled with the trembling of his hand. 'Tell your story without preaching, can't you?'

'I'll try, master. I hung about the street the whole day, eating nothing, and drinking very little. I might have been frozen, if my purpose hadn't kept me warm. I didn't grumble because I had to wait. I wanted him to come at night, and he came when I wanted. It isn't much more than an hour ago'—here he dropped his voice to a whisper—'that I saw a sailor turn the corner of the street where pretty Ellen Taylor lives. He had an accordion under his arm, and a cage in his hand covered with a blue pocket-handkerchief; and he stopped two or three times to look at the houses, and nodded to them as if he was wishing them a merry Christmas. I followed him, like a cat, and opened my knife. He was singing—I couldn't catch the words—and to judge from that and from the way he walked, I should say he was

as happy a man as any in London. He never once looked behind him; if he had, I would have struck him down. He stopped before the house where his father and mother lived, and stooped to the keyhole and listened. I was close upon him—waiting! If he hadn't been so much occupied, he might have smelt me at his back. But it wouldn't have saved him if he had seen me; he would only have been struck down the sooner. While he was listening at the keyhole, he laughed quietly, enjoying the surprise he was going to give his people. When he had his laugh out, he knocked at the door. Presently I heard a woman's voice inside the house ask, "Who's there?" "It's Josh," said my man. I heard a cry of pleasure; and as the door was being unfastened, I raised my knife, and stabbed him in the back.'

'And killed him?' cried Solomon Fewster involuntarily.

'I don't know. He fell; and as I ran off, I caught a glimpse of a woman kneeling by him in the snow, and raising his head to her bosom.'

Solomon Fewster groaned. Without another word he opened the door by which the Lascar had entered, and walked into the open air. The snow-fall had ceased, and the stars were shining. The

moon, too, had risen, and clouds of light and deep shade were gliding swiftly across it, while ever-changing shadows were playing on the snow. In the distance he heard the waits; they were a long way off, and the strains of music fell upon his ears chastened and mellowed. He was in danger; he had allied himself with this man, who made so light of the shedding of blood; and he had been made a confederate in perhaps a murder. Not that he had any compunction; not that he had any pity. Nothing would have rejoiced him more than to have heard that Joshua had been killed in a mutiny, had been wrecked, or had lost his life on sea or on land by any means, so that he was not implicated in it. The feelings that disturbed him now were purely selfish; he had to save himself from suspicion, supposing any discovery were made. Perhaps it would be best, after all, to speak plainly to the Lascar. There were no witnesses, and it did not matter much what he said. If Joshua were dead, the Lascar must be got rid of at any sacrifice of money. Thus resolving, he returned to the room. The Lascar was sitting patiently before the fire, and did not even raise his eyes as Mr. Fewster entered. 'He did not know what I went out for,' thought Mr.

Fewster. 'I might have gone for a policeman, and if I had brought one in, he would have declared I was his accomplice.'

'Has it left off snowing, master?' asked the Lascar.

'Yes.'

'Then it wouldn't be quite safe for me to go away to-night—safe for you, I mean.'

'You can stop here to-night.'

'Thank you, master. Have I done well?'

'It doesn't matter whether I say you have done well or ill; so, to save argument, suppose I say you have done well. Now, attend. If what you have done to-night should turn out to be——'

'Say murder, master,' said the Lascar, seeing that Mr. Fewster hesitated to speak plainly. 'I don't mind.'

'If it should turn out to be that, have you considered that you are in danger?'

'I haven't thought of it, master, and that's a fact. But if I am in danger, so are you.'

'That may or may not be. The only danger I am in is from what you might say; and, supposing I had spoken to you only once in my life, you would be free to say anything of me, or of

any one else, for that matter. What you might say wouldn't be evidence, you know.'

'True, master; but, at all events, I could ruin your chances with pretty Ellen Taylor.'

'What satisfaction would that be to you?'

'Every satisfaction,' said the Lascar with a kindling eye. 'If any one hurts me, I hurt him.'

'As you have hurt Joshua Marvel, because he hurt you.'

'And because I am in your service,' said the Lascar doggedly. 'Don't forget that, please; I don't intend to forget it. If this is to be a fair argument, let it be fair. If it is to be acting, let it be acting. What I have done to-night is half for me and half for you: equal shares.'

'I told you once that I would have no partnerships,' said Mr. Fewster in a steady voice, 'and I will have none; but I don't mind coming to a distinct understanding. If what you have done to-night should turn out at its worst——'

'Or its best,' interrupted the Lascar sneeringly.

'It will not be safe for you to remain in the country. To please you, I will say it will not be safe for you or for me.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the Lascar thoughtfully. 'I

think I understand you. Well, in that case there are plenty of countries I shouldn't mind going to; or I might go aboard ship again. How much will you give me?'

'A hundred pounds.'

'Agreed, master,—if it should turn out at its worst, as you say. But if it does not, I stay, mind you.'

'That is your affair.'

'As much yours as mine, master,' said the Lascar with determination.

'What makes you harp upon that, you dog!' exclaimed Mr. Fewster, firing up.

'Necessity,' replied the Lascar coolly. He liked the life of indolence he had been leading, and he did not intend to relinquish his hold of Solomon Fewster. 'I have no money, and no means of living. You have acted fairly to me up to now, and you must continue to do so. You can afford it, that's certain. I know what it is you fear. You fear that it should be known that I am in your service. Well, no one shall know it from me; and I will never come here again. You know where I stay. What you have to give me, leave there for me; and when you want me, send for me. I am your dog, ready to do your bidding.'

I can't speak fairer. There's no occasion for any more palaver. I'm tired and sleepy; I can sleep here, before the fire.' He stretched himself on the ground by the side of the fire. 'Silence gives consent, they say. If you don't speak, I shall understand that the affair is settled. You wanted a distinct understanding, you know.'

He closed his eyes, and listened for the answer. The answer came—in silence; for Solomon Fewster spoke not another word that night. The Lascar, made drowsy by the glare from the fire, courted sleep; and it came to him, as it comes to better men. And Solomon Fewster sat, looking down upon the form of the man who could blast his good name by a word, and thought——. What? Once during the night the Lascar awoke with a shiver. The fire had gone out; but Solomon Fewster was still sitting at the table with a haggard look upon his face, as if he had suddenly grown old.

CHAPTER III.

THE RIVALRY OF LOVE.

A SILENCE almost like the silence of the grave reigned in the house of the Marvels. If by some chance a blind man had found his way there, he might reasonably have wondered whether it was tenanted by ghosts or human beings. The persons in the house walked about it with such a ghostly motion, that scarcely a footfall could be heard. The doors were opened and shut as tenderly as if wounds were being handled, and as if rough treatment would cause them to cry out with pain. The very voices were hushed and low, and what was said was said in whispers. The blow by which Joshua had been struck down was a severe one, and wounded many besides himself. Notwithstanding Minnie's efforts, Joshua had lost a great deal of blood, and was laid on a sick-bed for many weeks. For a long time the doctor feared for his life; but good nursing and a strong constitution were in his favour.

‘But mind you, Mrs. Marvel,’ the doctor had said half-a-dozen times, ‘nothing *would* have saved him—not even his constitution, and it’s a good one; not even the nursing he has had, and no man ever had better—nothing *would* have saved him if Miss Kindred had not behaved like a heroine. You may thank that young lady for saving your son’s life. If she hadn’t stopped the flow of blood with her lips, all the doctors in London couldn’t have kept him in the world for twenty-four hours.’

When Minnie was told of this, she went to her room and locked herself in.

‘I have saved him!’ she said to herself, weeping tears of delicious joy. ‘I have saved his life! O, what happiness! I could die now, I am so happy!’

It might have been better for her if she had died then with those words upon her lips.

During the time that Joshua was in the greatest danger, Mrs. Marvel would allow no one but herself to sit up with him at night. She had a bed made up on the floor, and rested there, taking indeed but little sleep, until Joshua was out of danger. Minnie especially had pleaded hard to be allowed to sit up with her; but Mrs. Marvel was firm. Although she would not have confessed

it even to herself, she was jealous of the girl's solicitude ; and once expressed herself angrily because Minnie had offered to give Joshua his medicine. Afterwards, seeing Minnie in tears, Mrs. Marvel kissed her and begged her pardon in a gentle motherly way, which made Minnie cry the more. Mrs. Marvel found Minnie more difficult to manage than Ellen. Ellen was wonderfully undemonstrative and wonderfully obedient. And besides, Ellen was never in the way when she was not wanted, and was always at hand the instant she was required. There was an instinctive sympathy between Mrs. Marvel and Ellen which did not exist between Mrs. Marvel and Minnie. The good mother loved both the girls, but she loved Ellen like a daughter. In the second week of Joshua's illness a circumstance occurred which, for a short time, occasioned Mrs. Marvel much anxious thought. Joshua being more feverish than usual—for three weeks he was delirious, and did not know where he was or who were tending him—the girls hovered about the room (in their anxiety to be of some assistance) rather later than Mrs. Marvel generally allowed them.

‘ Go to bed, girls,’ said Mrs. Marvel.

Ellen rose obediently, and kissing Mrs. Marvel, and asking to be called if Mrs. Marvel wanted assistance in the night, went softly out of the room. But Minnie lingered behind, and with a yearning wistful look at Mrs. Marvel, begged, in the softest of whispers, to be allowed to sit up with her.

‘No, child,’ said Mrs. Marvel, ‘I can’t think of it. You would be of no use to me to-morrow if you were to sit up to-night.’

‘O yes, I should,’ said Minnie, still pleading; ‘you don’t know what a strong girl I am. Do let me stop with you! Do let me think that I can do something to help you!’

‘You can do a great deal if you obey me, Minnie; and you do assist me very much, my dear; but I will not let you sit up to-night. Hush!’ For here Joshua said something aloud, and murmured feverishly in his sleep. When he was quiet, Mrs. Marvel said, ‘Don’t distress me, dear Minnie; go to bed, like a good girl.’

Minnie, with deep sighs, went to the bedside to look at Joshua and to bid him a silent good-night—Mrs. Marvel regarding her jealously the while—and then crept out of the room in tears. The girls being gone, Mrs. Marvel felt more con-

tented. She sat down by her son's bedside, and, with that lightness of touch which nothing but a mother's pure love or that of a wife can impart, smoothed the bed-coverings, and brushed the hair from Joshua's eyes. At about eleven o'clock the handle of the door was gently turned, and Mr. Marvel entered. He had no boots on, and she had not heard him come up from the kitchen. Claspings his wife's hand, he leant over the bed to catch a glimpse of Joshua's face.

'He is better to-night, George,' she said; 'he is getting along nicely. The doctor said to-day that he will soon be sensible.'

George Marvel nodded, and put his lips to his wife's cheek.

'You must be very tired, Maggie.'

She replied by a bright smile.

'Shall I sit up for an hour while you lie down?'

'Yes, father;' knowing it would please him.

'Have you had supper?'

A nod.

'And your beer?'

Another nod.

'And your pipe?'

'Yes; Ellen got everything ready nicely. She is like you were when you were a girl, Maggie.'

‘Better than me, father.’

‘That’s not possible, wife.’ Ah, how her heart fluttered as he said the word! She trembled in his arms like a girl. ‘Now lie down; I’ll wake you in an hour.’

She had but to close her eyes—being satisfied that her darling son was in good hands—and she was asleep. George Marvel watched for an hour, and perhaps a little longer, and then touched his wife, who was instantly awake. Alone again, Mrs. Marvel resumed her loving vigil. Not a sound was to be heard except the occasional prattle of Joshua, now of Dan and the birds, now of ‘father’ and ‘mother,’ now of Ellen, now of Minnie and her shell. Mrs. Marvel had already learnt, through those unconscious confessions, that her son’s heart was as tender and as good as it had been before he had started in life for himself. A few minutes after the church-clock had struck two, Mrs. Marvel fancied she heard a soft breathing outside the bedroom door. She listened intently, thinking she must have been deceived; but no—the soft breathing, as of some one asleep, came distinctly to her ears. She went to the door and opened it, and, lying at the foot of the stairs in the narrow passage, she discovered Minnie, in her night-dress,

fast asleep. The girl had evidently kept awake until Ellen and Sarah were asleep, and had then stolen down-stairs, and had sat outside the door of the sick room until she had been overpowered by fatigue. Mrs. Marvel stooped over the sleeping girl and whispered,

‘Minnie!’

The sound of her name, chiming in with some dreaming fancy, brought a happy smile to the girl’s lips, and she answered,

‘Yes, Joshua!’

A look of pain passed into Mrs. Marvel’s face; she knelt by Minnie’s side, and gently raising the girl’s head, she whispered again,

‘Minnie! You’ll catch your death of cold lying here.’

Minnie, still sleeping, encircled Mrs. Marvel’s neck with her arms, and murmured, as she nestled close to the anxious mother’s breast,

‘Joshua! Love me! Love me, Joshua!’

Mrs. Marvel trembled as she looked upon the girl’s fair face, made fairer by the happy smile playing about the lips, and she felt a sudden chill at her heart.

‘O my poor Minnie!’ she said beneath her breath. ‘O my poor, poor Minnie!’

Then, by a strong effort, she raised the girl, and so awoke her.

Before Minnie had time to recover full consciousness, her name, uttered by Joshua in his fevered sleep, fell upon her ears. With a glad cry she sprang from Mrs. Marvel's arms into the sick room ; but Mrs. Marvel stepped swiftly before her, and taking her two hands prisoner, said, in a voice which, although very low, was stern and decided, 'I am seriously angry with you, Minnie.'

The sudden movements, the light in the room, and, above all, Mrs. Marvel's stern voice, restored Minnie to her senses. She drooped her head, and a hot blush of shame stole over her neck and face, while the hands which Mrs. Marvel held turned cold as ice. All Mrs. Marvel's sternness was gone, and pity only remained.

'Forgive me,' Minnie pleaded.

'I do, child,' said Mrs. Marvel, more agitated than Minnie was. 'I was obliged to speak sternly, or I should not have been able to wake you. Go to bed now, and be more obedient for the future.'

Minnie walked humbly into the passage, whither Mrs. Marvel followed her.

'Ah, not like that!' sighed Minnie, as Mrs.

Marvel turned to enter the room. 'Not like that! Kiss me, and say again that you forgive me.'

And Mrs. Marvel, distressed and pitiful, kissed Minnie, who clung to her for a few moments, sobbing quietly, and then crept to bed.

But who had struck the blow? Who was it that, waiting with malicious cunning until Joshua's foot was on the threshold of the home where so many loving hearts were eager to welcome him, had foully struck him down? Susan was the only one who had any suspicion; but she did not mention it, for she had not seen the Lascar for many months. When Minnie was questioned, she declared that she saw no one in the street. A neighbour asked why one of the men in the house did not look for footsteps in the snow and follow up the track. They could not tell why they had not done so; it would have been the right thing to do, undoubtedly, but it had not occurred to them. When Joshua was sufficiently recovered, he could not assist them. He was examined and cross-examined closely. Did he suspect any of the sailors? No; he was good friends with every person on board; was even a favourite with the captain and officers. Ah! per-

haps it sprang from that, they said ; one of his mates might have been jealous of him. No ; he was certain not one of them was. His own opinion was that he had been stabbed by a thief who wanted to rob him. But there ! what was the use of bothering about it ? Here he was, getting well and strong again, when it might have been so much worse. Thank God, in a few weeks he would be as well as ever. The day that Joshua was out of danger, the doctor told him that his life had been saved by Minnie.

‘In what way, sir ?’ asked Joshua.

‘Don’t you remember that, when you were struck——’ commenced the doctor. But Joshua interrupted him by saying that he remembered nothing from that moment.

‘I was walking along, too much occupied with the happiness of coming home to think of anything else. I remember looking at the houses in the street, and stopping before our house. I heard voices inside, or I thought I did. Indeed, it might have been fancy. I stooped to listen, and then knocked. Some one asked——ah, now I remember ! It was Minnie’s voice asking who was there. Just as I answered, a dizziness came over me ; I did not even know that I was struck.’

‘As you answered,’ said the doctor, taking up the narrative where Joshua dropped it, ‘Minnie opened the door. She saw you falling, and saw blood flowing from your neck. She threw herself by your side, and put her lips to the wound, and pressed so as to cause the blood to flow less freely. I honestly believe that if she had not done that, your life would not have been saved.’

Joshua did not pursue the conversation, and the doctor did not recur to the subject again. The following afternoon Joshua said to his mother,

‘Mother, I want to speak to Minnie.’

Mrs. Marvel, a little uneasily, went for Minnie, who came and sat by Joshua’s bed.

‘Are you better, Joshua?’ asked the girl.

‘Yes, dear Minnie,’ answered Joshua.

They spoke in whispers. Joshua put out his big hand, and Minnie clasped it.

‘Your hand is quite cold, Minnie.’ Minnie, indeed, was very agitated. ‘I owe you my life, dear Minnie, and I want to thank you for it. It almost seems to me, after what I have been told, as if my life belonged to you. Thank you, dear little Minnie—you used to like me to call you that!—thank you a thousand thousand times. I shall never be able to repay you!’

‘I don’t want payment, Joshua,’ said Minnie, when the wild beating of her heart was subdued. ‘It brought its own payment with it. It is, and ever will be, my sweetest remembrance. O Joshua! as the greatest unhappiness that ever could occur to me would be—’ (to lose you, she was about to say, but she checked the words in time)—‘to know that you would not recover, so the greatest happiness that I have ever experienced is to think that I have done you some little service.’

‘Little service! The greatest service—the most devoted action that woman could do to man! Perhaps—who knows?—one day I may be able to repay you in my own way.’ As if those words were not sufficient for her, who would have given her life for his. ‘Stoop down, Minnie!’ She inclined her head to the pillow. ‘Little Minnie, little Minnie!’ he whispered tenderly, and he placed his lips to her cheek. ‘Thank you for your devotion.’

It was fortunate for Minnie that it was dusk, and that her back was towards Mrs. Marvel, or the good mother would have had farther cause for anxiety and uneasiness in Minnie’s trembling form and flushed face. As it was, there was a long silence in the room; and Mrs. Marvel, approach-

ing softly to the bed to see if Joshua was asleep, broke the happy reverie into which Minnie had fallen.

Solomon Fewster came to the house every day to inquire after Joshua, and went away every day with content in his face and despair in his heart. If ever a man played a double part, he played it during that time. 'If he would but die!' he thought many and many a time. 'If mortification would set in, or erysipelas, or something that would kill him!' And 'I am truly happy to hear it,' he said, many and many a time, to Mrs. Marvel, as in answer to his inquiries she told him that Joshua was improving rapidly. 'I have brought a little jelly for him,' which Mrs. Marvel received thankfully. At other times he would bring a chicken or some other delicacy to tempt Joshua's appetite, and would walk from the house with earnest wishes that what he left would choke the invalid. 'I shall never forget Mr. Fewster's kindness,' said Mrs. Marvel. 'I feel quite angry with myself; for I did not give him credit for so much good feeling. But it is just in such times as these that a man shows the real goodness of his heart.' And Mr. Fewster met with his reward immediately; for they were all grate-

ful to him for his attention to Joshua. Mr. Marvel always had a hearty word for him, Minnie always a bright look, Ellen always a kind welcome now. But it was both sweet and bitter to him. 'Ellen looks kindly upon me,' he thought, and thought truly, 'because I profess myself kind to Joshua. Will it ever be otherwise? Yes; if money can make it so, it shall be. And money can do much.'

Yes, money can do much; but it cannot buy love, although it is often paid for it.

The most delicious three months of Joshua's life dated from the day on which the doctor declared him to be out of danger. He lived in an atmosphere of love. Loving hearts, loving hands, loving looks, loving thoughts, surrounded him. Is it better to have those than to be great and rich and powerful? Too modest for ambition are such blessings. Yet are they the sweetest, the holiest attributes of life. Of life, which is nothing without pleasures which cost money. Of life, which is not worth the living without fine linen and rich food. Of life, which is useless without the restless striving, the absorbing ambition, which make up the sum of human progress. Of Life, the Paradox!

Something which has fallen out of its proper place may be mentioned here. When Joshua was carried into the house on that memorable Christmas night, two things that had fallen from his hands were picked up from the snow and carried in after him. One of these was his accordion, the other was a white cockatoo in a cage, which Joshua had brought home from the South Seas. Whether it was that the cockatoo was overwhelmed at finding itself in a strange land, or that it deemed it necessary to be silent in the distressing circumstances of the case, it certainly behaved itself in a most exemplary manner, and gave no indication that it possessed a tongue. The cockatoo was taken to Dan's house, which was but a very few doors from Joshua's, and two or three days afterwards Dan was startled by hearing his name called in a strange loud voice. He looked up at Ellen, and asked if she had spoken. She had just time to say 'No,' when *her* name was called in the same strange loud voice.

'Why, it's the cockatoo!' exclaimed Dan.

Sure enough, it was the cockatoo, which, now that its tongue was loosened, made as much use of it as a woman could have done. Its stock of language was not large, consisting only of a shrill

‘Dan!’ a shrill ‘Dan and Jo!’ a shrill ‘Ellen!’ a shrill ‘Minnie!’ and a softer articulation of ‘Bread-and-cheese and kisses! and kisses! and kisses!’ winding up with a volley of kisses, which it continued until it was completely out of breath. No stronger proof of Joshua’s attachment could have been received by Dan and Ellen. Dan was much affected by it.

‘You see how he was thinking of us all the time he was away,’ he said to Ellen, with tears in his eyes. ‘What shall I do if he dies!’

But Joshua did not die, and it was not very long afterwards that Dan was sitting in his friend’s bedroom, surrounded by his birds as usual. It was like the old time come over again. Here they were, man and man, talking often as if they were boys. So much had to be told! The loss of Dan’s parents, Dan entering into business, and how they all came to be living together.

‘Wonderful, wonderful!’ said Joshua, again and again. ‘Like a story in a book.’

‘Just what I said,’ said Dan; ‘like a romance.’

Who should come to the house one day but the captain of Joshua’s ship, the *Merry Andrew*? The part he plays in this story is a small one, but eventful enough in all conscience. He was

a shrewd man of business and a good officer. It was to his interest to have good men about him ; for he was the principal owner of the ship, and he was remarkably sensible in any matter affecting his interests. He had heard of what had occurred to Joshua, and he was very sorry for it, because he had been so satisfied with Joshua's conduct on board his ship, that he had determined to make the young sailor his third mate on the next voyage. Therein he showed his eccentricity ; most other captains would have chosen a man who had already filled that position satisfactorily. But Captain Liddle liked to judge for himself, and Joshua had found favour in his eyes. The young sailor was steady and attentive, and had made some progress in the study of navigation. There was one especial reason why Captain Liddle wanted steady men with him on his next voyage. He was about to get married, and he was going to take his young wife with him. There was great excitement in the house when Captain Liddle announced himself. Joshua, who was in bed, wanted to rise, but Captain Liddle would not allow him.

‘Lie easy, lie easy, Marvel,’ he said ; ‘you’ll get better all the sooner.’

‘I hoped to come with you, sir, on your next voyage,’ said Joshua.

‘Well, I had some thought of that myself,’ said Captain Liddle.

‘Do you go out soon, sir?’

‘Not for three months, Marvel; perhaps not for four. The ship’s undergoing a thorough overhauling. She’ll have a precious freight in her next trip.’

‘What loading, sir?’

Captain Liddle’s eyes twinkled. ‘Female. Lie easy, lie easy, Marvel;’ for Joshua had given another start. ‘Mrs. Captain Liddle. I shall be married soon, and my wife goes out with me.’

Joshua murmured respectful congratulations.

‘Thank you, thank you, Marvel. Now, I’ll tell you what I have come especially for. First, though, how long before you are well?’

‘I am well now, sir.’

‘Strong, I mean; able to get about and do your work like a man.’

‘Not for two months, I am afraid, sir.’

‘That will do. Now, then. You get strong in two months, and you shall go out with me in my next trip as third mate of the Merry Andrew.

Lie easy, lie easy, Marvel. What do you say to it, eh ?

‘Say to it, sir! O——’

‘Lie easy, lie easy, my lad. When you get strong come to the ship, and write a few lines soon telling me how strong you are getting.—Mrs. Marvel, your son is a good sailor, and will make a good officer.—And this is Dan, that you told me of once? A good head; but not so strong in the legs as Marvel, eh?’

‘No, sir,’ said Dan with a bright smile, for he was overjoyed at Joshua’s good fortune; ‘but it wouldn’t do for all of us to be strong, sir; consider the doctors.’

‘Why, here is a ship, ropes and sails and all! And birds!’

Obedient to Dan’s signal, the sailor-birds flew up the ropes, and stood on the slender cross-trees, as proud as if they had passed their lives in the service.

‘Good—good!’ said Captain Liddle. ‘For sale, eh?’

‘No; they are not mine, sir; they belong to an old sailor.’

‘Very proper.—Ah, young lady,’ to Minnie, who had been in the room, but in the back-

ground, during the captain's visit; 'and what do you think of the sea?'

'If I had been a man, sir,' said Minnie modestly and quietly, 'I should like to have been a sailor.'

'Very proper—very proper.—Good-day, Marvel. Get strong as quickly as you can. You'll have to superintend cargo.'

Mr. Marvel, coming home at night, was told the good news before he had time to take the comforter from his neck. He ran upstairs at once to his son's room. 'A sailor first, and then a captain,' he exclaimed, recalling Joshua's words when he first announced his wish. 'Do you remember, Josh?'

'Yes, father, yes,' said Joshua eagerly.

'It's better than being a wood-turner, Josh,' said George Marvel triumphantly.

'I should think so, indeed. You'll see!'

'There, Maggie!' observed Mr. Marvel to his wife, later on in the evening. 'What did I tell you? And you was against it all the while, and wanted him to be a wood-turner. He'll be a captain before he's thirty.'

'He is spared, I hope, for great things,' said Mrs. Marvel meekly; 'and to be a blessing to us all.'

That same night, Dan and Joshua and Ellen spent some very happy hours together. Minnie was with Susan, attending her father, so that the three were undisturbed. Mrs. Marvel opened the door once; but seeing the group, and observing how engrossed they were, she shut it softly, and went down again into the kitchen. Once, also, George Marvel was going out of the kitchen, when his wife called to him,

‘Where are you going, father?’

‘To Joshua’s room.’

‘Don’t go, George. Come and sit down; I want to speak to you.’

Mr. Marvel resumed his seat, and Mrs. Marvel refilled his pipe and handed it to him, with a light, ‘There! smoke your pipe, and don’t be so restless.’

He took a few whiffs, and asked who was with Joshua.

‘Ellen and Dan; and they are very happy and comfortable. I peeped in once, and I wouldn’t disturb them.’

‘O!’ said Mr. Marvel reflectively, dwelling lengthily upon that smallest of words.

‘I have reasons, George,’ said Mrs. Marvel quietly. ‘I never saw Ellen look so happy and pretty as she looks to-night.’

Mr. Marvel nodded two or three times with an expression of satisfaction. 'Do you think, mother,' he commenced; and then he paused, and repeated, 'Do you think, mother, that'——and then he paused again, as if he had said enough to make his meaning clear.

'Yes, I do, George,' said Mrs. Marvel. 'I had my doubts, but now I really think it will be so.'

'That will be a real good thing;' rubbing his hands. 'Here's hoping so!' and he drank a full glass of beer to his mysterious toast.

What was going on upstairs that the wood-turner and his wife were loth to interrupt? Merely a recalling of old reminiscences and a closer drawing together of three hearts, which might have been one, for the undivided affection for each other with which they were filled.

'Thinking of then, when everything before us was so uncertain, and of now, when everything before us is so bright and clear,' said Joshua, 'makes me almost believe that our ways are shaped for us, and that, if we strive to do our duty, our reward is certain.'

'It is too deep a question for us, Jo,' said Dan; 'so many considerations spring out of it.'

As to whether every good man is happy. As to whether every man who strives to do right is spared pain and misery. At all events, it is certain that the very best thing to do is to do what is right, and to be straightforward and honest. It is not too often done, I am afraid. I haven't seen anything of the world, but it strikes me that that is not the way of it.'

'If ever I am captain of a ship—and I may be, Dan—it looks promising—'

'That it does, Jo.'

'You shall come with me a voyage. I will have everything snug for you; hammock on deck the same as that day we spent with the Old Sailor—ah, what a day was that!'

'I can recall every moment of it; from the night before, when Ellen stood at the window watching the rain, and my waking up in the morning waiting for you to come—O, so anxiously! And the flowers, and the birds—the poor birds!—and the breakfast, and the ride! I tell you what, Jo. Stories could be made out of these things. But the day wouldn't have been the day it was if Ellen had not been with us.'

Ellen smiled, and her eyes sparkled.

'Everything connected with it is so vivid to

my mind just now,' said Joshua, 'that it only wants one thing to make it complete; and that is for Ellen to sing "Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses," as she sang it in the Old Sailor's cabin.'

Ellen, in a low voice, sang the song; and they were silent for a long while, musing happily. Then Joshua made a remark that his pillow was not nicely arranged, and Ellen smoothed it for him. Her arm necessarily was round his neck for a moment—only for a moment by her own will; for when she would have withdrawn it, Joshua held it there, and she, with impulse as pure as pure heart and mind could make it, allowed it to remain. What wonder that a silence of longer duration followed?

Ah! if a magic spell had fallen upon them then, a spell that would have transfixed them and made their happiness eternal!

Not one of them knew how long that blissful trance lasted. It was broken by the slightest sound—it might have been the opening of a door, or even the light tread of our old friend the tortoiseshell cat—but whatever the sound was, the trance was at an end, and they were all awake again. Ellen withdrew her arm, and, with down-cast eyes, hurriedly left the room. Joshua turned

to Dan, and holding out his hand, said, 'Dan, take my hand, and say, Brother Jo.'

'I do. Brother Jo!'

'That's good; isn't it, Dan?'

'Yes, Jo.'

'Brothers more than in heart, Dan, as we have always been. But brothers really and truly, if Ellen says yes.'

'Ellen loves you, Jo. You have but to ask.' He paused for a little while before he spoke again. 'There is something in my mind that it is right you should know. It is the only thing I have ever kept from you; but now, since you have told me about yourself and Ellen——'

'Did you ever doubt it, Dan?'

'I wasn't certain, Jo. You have removed a great weight from my heart. It seems strange that now, when I see the almost certain prospect of your future being as bright as we used to hope it would be—it seems strange that I cannot say I am happy. Yet one thing would make me so perfectly.'

'There is no cloud between you and me, Dan?'

'None—nor ever will be, brother of my heart. But a great hope, shadowed by a great fear, has

entered into my soul—a hope which, fulfilled, would make earth heaven for me. Is it too precious a thing to pray for? It seems so to me. I tremble as I think of it. But if it is not to be, I hope I shall soon die.’

‘Dan!’ cried Joshua in alarm, for Dan’s last words were like a cry of agony.

‘Haven’t you seen it, Jo? Haven’t you suspected it? I love her so that, if I knew she were lost to me, I scarcely think I could live. I love her so that, if she were lost to me, some stronger motive, some stronger feeling than any I can now think of, would have to animate me to make my future less black than the blackest night.’

‘You mean Minnie, Dan?’

‘Yes; she is my light. Ah, Jo! How I love her! I have never spoken of it till now; I have never dared to breathe it. And now that I speak of it for the first time, it frightens me.’

‘Nay, Dan, take courage. You are frightened by shadows.’

‘If I could think so!’ mused Dan in a less agitated voice. ‘What can I, a cripple, offer her? Love! Yes, I can offer her that, pure and undefiled. Nothing more—nothing more! Keep my secret, Jo.’

‘Yes, Dan,’ said Joshua sadly.

‘If all should come right in the end, Jo!
You and Ellen, and me and Minnie!’

He trembled, and burying his face in his hands, thought of the happy night when the Old Sailor traced Joshua’s course on the map, and when Minnie’s arm was round his neck and her cheek had touched his. How many times had he thought of those few blissful moments, and what balm and comfort had the memory brought him!

CHAPTER IV.

SUNSHINE AND CLOUD.

‘GEORGE,’ said Mrs. Marvel to her husband one night, when they were alone in their room, ‘what has come over Mr. Kindred? He is quite changed.’

‘I’ve noticed it too, mother,’ said Mr. Marvel, ‘but I haven’t thought of it much, because, to tell you the truth, I don’t believe he is quite right here’—touching his forehead.

Mrs. Marvel had not mentioned to any one—not even to her husband—how Minnie had distressed her during Joshua’s illness. The girl had not asked her to keep silence upon the subject; indeed, no word had passed between them about it; but Mrs. Marvel judged that it would be best for Minnie’s sake, and for Joshua’s also, to let the matter rest. Since the night when Mrs. Marvel had discovered Minnie lying asleep at Joshua’s door, the girl had given her no farther cause for displeasure. Mrs. Marvel’s fears were dispelled;

for Minnie showed nothing more than a friendly interest in Joshua's recovery. But if the good mother had been less openly observant of Minnie's every look and action, her fears would have grown stronger. For after the interview between Joshua and Minnie, when Joshua had thanked her and kissed her, Mrs. Marvel set herself the task of closely observing Minnie's conduct towards Joshua. And Minnie discovered it, and so behaved herself that Mrs. Marvel was thrown completely off her guard. Minnie displayed a carelessness and an indifference concerning Joshua's health, at which Mrs. Marvel at any other time would have been hurt; but now she was silently grateful, in the belief that her fears were groundless.

Joshua was better. With the exception of a scar upon his neck, where the Lascar had stabbed him, he was as well and strong as ever he had been. He had grown into a fine handsome man; and the affectionate disposition which had characterised him as a boy seemed to have become stronger with his strength. The affection that existed between him and Dan was unchanged and unchangeable. He took as much delight in the birds as ever he had done; and, notwithstanding that he and Dan were men now, with deepened

passions and stronger aspirations, their hearts were as tender to each other as in the younger days of their friendship, when they mingled their tears together over the death of Golden Cloud.

Everything was bright before them. Dan had not spoken to Minnie of his love for her; but he was made happy by a gradual change in her behaviour towards him. She grew more and more affectionate, spoke softly to him, looked kindly at him, and did not repulse the little tender advances he dared to make to her now and then.

‘When you are gone to sea, Jo,’ he said to Joshua in the course of a conversation in which, in the fulness of his joy at Minnie’s kindness, he had unbosomed himself to his friend, ‘I shall speak to her, and tell her I love her.’ He spoke very slowly, and his eyes were towards the ground; it was so sacred a subject with him, that his voice trembled when he spoke of it. ‘Once on a time, before I knew her, Jo, you, and you alone, filled my heart; but I had no idea then of a man’s passions and a man’s fears. I think I should have disbelieved any person then who told me that you would have a rival in my heart. But you have, Jo; although you are not less loved for all that.’

‘I understand you, Dan, and am content. I am proud of your love. If I were to lose it, the sweetness would go out of life.’

‘So it would be with me, Jo; but you can never lose it—never, never. I think you and I know what love is. In the midst of all our trouble when you first went away—trouble that came upon us so suddenly that I began to be frightened of it—I found consolation in thinking of our love for each other. Misfortunes came. Never mind, I thought; Joshua loves me. Mother died, father died; we were left penniless; and I thought of you, and was comforted. You had grown so in my heart—like the roots of a tree, Jo—that, if I had ceased to love you, my heart would have ceased to beat. It is the same now; but Minnie is in my heart side by side with you. I shall tell her, you know, by and by. By and by,’ he repeated softly. ‘The thought of it is like heaven to me; for I have begun to hope.’

It was on that same afternoon that Ellen was sitting in her bedroom looking at her face in the looking-glass. She was fair; and she knew it, and was proud of it. But it was not vanity that caused her to sit, with her chin upon her hands, looking into the glass. Of a very modest type of

womanhood was Ellen; not a heroine of the Joan-of-Arc order, who, with all her false glitter about her, would have been a woman after very few men's hearts. Ellen was of the quiet order of women, of whom there are thousands growing up in happy English homes, thank heaven! and who are blessed and contented and happy, notwithstanding their sisters' unwomanly cries about woman's rights. May English women like Ellen, modest and constant and loving, increase and multiply with every succeeding year! Ellen was thinking of herself a little, as she looked into the glass, and of Joshua a great deal. He had not spoken to her yet; but he would soon, she knew. And as she sat and saw her pretty face looking at her, whose step but Joshua's should she hear coming up the stairs? He went into the adjoining room—Dan's room; and she heard him moving about, and—yes; singing! Singing what? Why, 'Bread-and-Cheese and Kisses.' The heroine's name in the song is Kate; but Joshua sang:

'I said to Nell, my darling wife,
In whom my whole life's bliss is,
"What have you got for dinner, Nell?"
"Why, bread-and-cheese and kisses!"'

He said to *Nell*, his darling wife! The happy

tears ran down Ellen's face; but they were soon dried; and Ellen kept very quiet, fearing that Joshua might hear her move. But Joshua went downstairs singing; and then Ellen smiled at herself in the glass, and peeped at herself through her fingers; and it wasn't an ugly picture to look at, if any one had been there to see.

It was all settled without a word passing between them. I don't believe there ever was such another courtship. They were sitting in Mrs. Marvel's kitchen: only four of them — father, mother, Ellen, and Joshua. It really looked like a conspiracy that no other person came into the kitchen that night; but there they were, conspiracy or no conspiracy. There was Mrs. Marvel, knitting a pair of stockings for Joshua; not getting along very fast with them, it must be confessed; for her spectacles required a great deal of rubbing. And there was Mr. Marvel, smoking his pipe, throwing many a furtive look in the direction of Joshua and Ellen, who were sitting next to each other, happy and silent. There is no record of how long they sat thus without speaking; but suddenly, although not abruptly, Joshua put his arm round Ellen's waist, and drew her closer to him. It was only a look

that passed between them; and then Joshua kissed Ellen's lips, and she laid her head upon his breast.

‘Mother! father! look here!’

Mrs. Marvel rose, all of a tremble, and laid her hand upon Ellen's head, and kissed the young lovers. But Mr. Marvel behaved quite differently. He cast one quick satisfied look at the two youngsters; and then he turned from them, and continued smoking as if nothing unusual had occurred.

‘Well, father!’ exclaimed Joshua, rather surprised at his father's silence.

‘Well, Josh!’ replied Mr. Marvel.

‘Do you see this?’ asked Joshua, with his arm round Ellen's waist.

Ellen, blushing rosy red, looked shyly at Mr. Marvel; but he looked stolidly at her in return.

‘Yes; I see it, Josh,’ said Mr. Marvel, without any show of emotion.

‘And what do you say to it?’

‘What do I say to it, Josh?’ replied Mr. Marvel with dignity. ‘Well, I believe I'm your father; and, as such, I think you should ask me if I was agreeable. I thought it proper to ask

my father, Josh. It isn't because I'm a wood-turner——'

'No, no, father,' interrupted Joshua; 'I made a mistake. Ellen and I thought——'

'Ellen and you thought,' repeated Mr. Marvel.

'That if you were agreeable——' continued Joshua.

'That if I was agreeable,' repeated Mr. Marvel.

'And if you would please to give your consent——' said Joshua, purposely prolonging his preamble.

'And if I would be pleased to give my consent,' repeated Mr. Marvel with a slight chuckle of satisfaction.

'That, as we love each other very much, we would like to get married.'

'That's dutiful,' said Mr. Marvel, laying down his pipe, oracularly. 'I'm only agreeable, Josh, because I am old, and because I am married. As I said to mother the other night, when we was talking the matter over—ah, you may stare; but we knew all about it long ago. Didn't we, mother? Well, as I was saying to mother the other night, if I was a young man, and mother wasn't in the way, I'd marry her myself; and you might

go a-whistling. Shiver my timbers, my lass !' he cried, breaking through the trammels of wood-turning, and becoming suddenly nautical, 'come and give me a kiss.'

Which Ellen did ; and so the little comedy ended happily. Joshua, having a right now to sit with his arm round Ellen's waist, availed himself of it, you may be sure. If Ellen went out of the room, he had also a right to go and inquire where she was going ; and this, curiously enough, happened four or five times during the night. If anything could have added to the happiness of Mr. Marvel—except being anything but a wood-turner, which, at his age, was out of the question—it was this proceeding of Joshua's. Every time Joshua followed Ellen out of the room, Mr. Marvel looked at his wife with pleasure beaming from his eyes.

'It puts me in mind of the time when I came a-courting you, mother,' he said. 'How the world spins round ! It might have been last night when you and me was saying good-bye at the street-door.'

Mrs. Marvel had not spoken to her husband without cause of the change that had taken place

in Basil Kindred. A very remarkable change had indeed taken place in him. A mistrustful expression had settled itself upon his face, accompanied by a keen hungry watchfulness of all that occurred around him. He gave short answers, and was snappish and morose. Yet not a look, not a word, not a gesture escaped his notice. He did not avoid his friends; he rather courted their society. He repelled their advances, but he sat among them, watching. Every sense was employed in that all-absorbing task. What was it that he was trying to discover?

The change was so sudden. A few days ago he was, as he had ever been hitherto, frank and cheerful—even gay sometimes. Now, all that was gone. In place of frankness, mistrust; in place of cheerfulness, gloom. Susan was the only one, with the exception of his daughter, to whom he did not speak with a certain bitterness. His manner to all the others was as though some sensitive chord in his nature had been sorely wounded—as though all men were his foes—as though his faith in what was good and noble in human nature had been violently disturbed.

See him now. He and Minnie have been sitting together for hours. He has been strangely

stern and strangely tender to her in turns, but she is used to his wayward moods. He has detained her by his side all the morning, upon one and another idle pretext; and she, as if wishful to please him, has humoured him, and been wonderfully submissive and obedient. But once she had fallen into a reverie—not a happy one—and he had broken it by asking her in a harsh voice what she was dreaming about. She replied only by a startled look, and resumed her work, which had been lying idly in her lap. Repentant of his harshness, he turned his head from her to hide the sudden spasm which passed into his face.

‘Are you ill?’ she asked.

‘No, dear child.’

‘In pain?’

‘No, dear child.’

Presently she put aside her work, and rose to leave the room.

‘Where are you going?’ he asked in a strangely-anxious voice.

‘To see Mrs. Marvel,’ was her answer.

‘Sit you down,’ he cried sternly.

She hesitated and lingered by the door, beating the ground with her foot irresolutely. Seeing

that, he grasped her wrist firmly, and hurt her without intending to do so. The muscles of her face quivered, but not from the pain.

‘O Minnie, my child!’ he cried; then, releasing her, ‘have I hurt you?’

‘No,’ she answered in a hard voice. ‘Why do you not wish me to go to Mrs. Marvel’s house? You have forbidden me before.’

‘You trouble them too much.’

‘That is not your reason, father,’ she said in the same hard voice. ‘You are hiding something from me.’

‘Are you not hiding something from me, Minnie?’ he asked, looking anxiously into her face.

‘What should I hide from you?’ she asked, in reply, coldly and evasively. ‘I am not well, father. I can’t stop in this room. I will not go where you do not wish me.’

He did not detain her, and she glided swiftly out of the room. He was about to follow her, when a dizziness came upon him, and he sank into a chair. It was only by a strong effort of will that he kept himself from fainting.

‘My strength is deserting me,’ he muttered, his breath coming thick and fast; ‘scarcely a

day passes but this weakness comes upon me.' He held up his hand; it trembled like a leaf. 'Have I failed in my duty to her? Is it my fault that she does not confide in me? Or is this a wicked lie?' He took a letter from his pocket, and read it, not once, but many times. 'No,' he groaned; 'it is true. I feel that it is true.' He rose to his feet, and felt like one just risen from a sick bed. He was as weak as a child; so weak, indeed, that the consciousness of his weakness brought tears into his eyes; and he said, in a voice of anguish, 'Now, when my child's happiness—her honour, perhaps—depends upon my watchful care, I am helpless. If I had some one that I could trust! some one to help me!' He heard a step upon the stairs. It was like an answer to his wish. 'It is Susan,' he muttered; 'the one being that I know in the world who would serve me faithfully. Susan, Susan!'

She heard him, although his voice was faint and low, and entered the room. Alarmed by the traces of illness in his face, she hastened to his side.

'You are ill,' she said, assisting him to a seat. 'Can I do anything for you?'

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘You can do much. You can be my friend.’

‘Your friend!’ she exclaimed. Had she not always been his friend? But there was a deeper meaning in his voice than she had ever heard before, and his appeal sent thrills of pleasure to her heart.

‘I am ill,’ he continued; ‘but it is more from weakness than anything else. I am not in pain. A dizziness seizes me, as it seized me just now, and I feel as if my senses were leaving me. I can scarcely stand; and I have no one to trust to.’

‘Not Minnie!’ she said softly and wonderingly.

‘Hush! Minnie, of all others, must not be told of this. Can I trust you?’

‘I would work till I dropped to serve you.’

A flush came into his face.

‘To serve me and Minnie?’ he said.

‘Yes; to serve you and Minnie.’

‘Give me your sacred promise that what passes between us now will never be divulged, will never be spoken of, by you, unless my tongue is sealed, and the time comes when it may be necessary to speak.’

‘Does it concern you?’ she asked with a natural hesitation; for there was a feverishness in his manner that alarmed her.

‘It concerns me and Minnie.’

‘I promise.’

‘Faithfully and sacredly?’

‘Faithfully and sacredly.’

He took her hand and pressed it, and then gave her the letter, and asked her to read it. It contained but a few words, but they were sufficient to cause a look of horror to start into her eyes.

‘Can it be true?’ she asked, more of herself than of him; and her trembling lips turned white and parched in an instant.

‘Susan,’ said Basil Kindred, ‘I have lived long enough in the world to know its falseness. In years gone by, men have smiled in my face and shaken me by the hand, and I have learnt afterwards, that while their manner spoke me fair, there was treachery in their hearts. My life has been a hard one, what with false friends and bitter poverty; but I bore it all patiently, and lived—lived, when a hundred times voices have whispered in my ear, “Die, and be at peace!” I had an object to live for—Minnie, my darling

child ! So I lived and suffered, rather than die and leave her unprotected. It was a bitter, bitter life. You can guess how hard a thing it was for me to find food for her, and how often she had to go without it, before the day when you and that boy—I cannot utter his name—came to our rescue. From that time until this dark cloud—he placed his hand on the letter—‘fell upon me, I have been happy. And now, when I need all my strength to fulfil my duty as a father—when it seems to me a crime that I should allow her to go from my side—this weakness strikes me down.’

‘Does she know?’

‘She knows, and must know, nothing. But she must be watched. If there be no truth in this letter—and there may not be—’

‘I pray not ! O, I pray not !’ cried Susan. ‘For others’ sakes as well as yours.’

‘I understand you ; if there be no truth in it, no one need know of it but you and I.’

‘What shall I do?’

‘Watch her and him, without seeming to do so,’ said Basil Kindred. ‘If she goes out, follow her if you can without letting her see you, and let me know all you see and hear. Mind, I say

all ; keep nothing from me. You have promised sacredly.'

'I will do what you bid me.'

He raised her hand to his lips, and in the midst of her great sorrow his action brought a happy feeling to her heart. When she was gone, Basil Kindred unlocked a desk and took out a clasped book, in which he wrote a few lines. 'It is necessary,' he sighed, 'for my memory is lost to me sometimes, and I cannot recall events ; and it may save me from doing an injustice.' Then he replaced the book and locked the desk.

* * * * *

That night, in her room, Susan sat upon her bed and bowed her head to her knees, sobbing, 'O my poor Dan ! O my poor, poor Ellen ! if, after all these years, you should find him false !'

CHAPTER V.

THE ONLY DUTY THAT MINNIE CAN UNDERSTAND.

THE Merry Andrew was nearly ready for sea again, and Joshua, having been duly installed as third mate, was busily employed superintending cargo. The Old Sailor was immensely delighted, and took an active interest in Joshua's doings. When he was told of the engagement between Joshua and Ellen, he smacked Joshua on the back and shook his hand again and again, and kissed Ellen a dozen times, the old rogue ! as if he were the lucky man, and Joshua had nothing to do with it. He took a private opportunity of entering into a confidential conversation with the young lovers, and told them he had made over his barge and all his little property to Ellen and Joshua jointly, 'for better or worse,' he added, with a vague idea that those words were necessary in the circumstances of the case. And he took many other private opportunities of instructing Joshua in the duties of mate and master, and also in

navigation and astronomy. He was more exacting than any Marine Board would have been, and his instructions and examinations were of a very severe and precise character. But he had a willing and an apt pupil in Joshua; and he delighted Ellen by whispering to her confidentially that Joshua would make as fine a mariner as could be found in the service. The examinations generally took place when only the Old Sailor, Joshua, and Ellen were together; and then Joshua propounded, to the satisfaction of his teacher, such problems as, how he would send a top-gallant-yard down in a gale of wind; what he would do if he wanted to shiver his main topsail-yard when the leeches were taut and the main yard could not be touched; how to turn in a dead eye; what he would do if he wanted to tack on a lee shore, and the ship wouldn't come round, and there was not room to wear; and so on, and so on. The Old Sailor was not satisfied with simple answers, but insisted upon the why and the wherefore; so that what with working and studying and sweet-hearting, Joshua's time was well taken up. Ellen herself became quite learned in certain matters concerning Joshua's profession, and made him laugh heartily by the wise air she assumed when

she repeated the twelve signs of the zodiac, which she had learnt by heart perfectly, from Aries to Pisces. Joshua, repeating after her, would purposely leave out Gemini or Aquarius, or another sign, and would instantly be taken to account. In this simple way many happy hours were passed. The Old Sailor had a great liking for Captain Liddle, because he was a thorough sailor, and Captain Liddle admired the Old Sailor for the simplicity of his character.

‘You are in luck’s way,’ said the Old Sailor to Joshua: ‘you are sailing under a good master—not a land saint and sea devil—but a good officer and a kind man; and you have the dearest and the truest-hearted lass in the world to stand by you through life. Do your duty, Josh, to her and to your ship.’

‘I will do my duty to both, sir, you may depend.’

The Old Sailor took out his pocket-handkerchief, and thoughtfully dabbed his face. ‘I don’t doubt that you will, my lad,’ he said, ‘and to Dan as well.’ Now the Old Sailor uttered these last words with a significance that seemed intended to convey a deep meaning. His action was appropriately mysterious. He looked round

cautiously, after the best manner of stage robbers, and hooked Joshua nearer to him by a motion of his forefinger. 'Hark ye, my lad,' he whispered, guiding the words to Joshua's ear by placing his open palm on one side of his mouth; 'Hark ye. Do you suspect anything?'

Joshua opened his eyes very wide at this; he had not the slightest consciousness of the Old Sailor's meaning.

'You don't?' continued the Old Sailor in the same mysterious manner. 'So much the better. I didn't suppose you did. Now, supposing—mind, I only say supposing, my lad—supposing you were asked to do a very out-of-the-way thing for Dan's sake, but a thing notwithstanding that you would be very glad to do—this with a chuckle expressive of intense enjoyment—'would you do it?'

'Would I do it, sir!' exclaimed Joshua warmly. 'I don't think you or any one could ask me to do a thing for Dan's sake, that I shouldn't be glad to do.'

'Just my opinion,' said the Old Sailor, still in the same charnel-house whisper; 'and if Dan's happiness depended upon your doing this out-of-the-way thing——'

‘Why, then, sir, more eagerly and willingly than ever.’

‘That’s plain sailing ; it might come to pass, or it mightn’t,’ said the Old Sailor, returning his handkerchief to its abiding place in the bosom of his shirt, to denote that the conversation was at an end.

But this did not satisfy Joshua. ‘What might come to pass, sir ?’ he asked.

The Old Sailor winked craftily at Joshua, and said, ‘All I’ve got to say is, that it might come to pass or it mightn’t.’

And try as he would, that was all the satisfaction Joshua could obtain from the Old Sailor.

In the mean time Basil Kindred’s condition had become so serious, that he was unable to leave his room, and he was unreasonably obstinate in his refusal to see a doctor. He knew well enough what was the matter with him, he said, and doctors could not relieve him. But one day, urged by Dan, Minnie brought a doctor to his bedside without consulting him.

‘Your daughter brought me,’ said the doctor, seeing that Basil was displeased, and wisely judging that mention of his daughter would calm him.

Basil called Minnie to him and kissed her.

‘Go out of the room, child,’ he said; ‘what passes between me and the doctor must be private.’

Minnie obeyed, and went downstairs to sit with Dan, and the doctor remained with his patient for half-an-hour. As the doctor came down, Minnie opened the door of Dan’s room, and the doctor entered.

‘Well, sir?’ asked Dan.

‘Your father is suffering from rheumatism and low fever,’ said the doctor, addressing Minnie. ‘I have left a prescription in his room; run and get it.’

Minnie went upstairs, and the doctor said to Dan, ‘You are very anxious about Mr. Kindred.’

‘Yes, sir, very anxious, both for his sake and for Minnie’s.’

‘Minnie—ah, yes, his daughter. Well, I may tell you in confidence what I must not tell her. He is suffering from something more than rheumatic fever. He has a disease which may prove fatal at any moment. A strong mental shock would very likely be fatal to him. His mind is far from tranquil at the present time, and it is absolutely necessary that he should have quiet and repose. Good-morning.’

Grieved as Dan was to hear this, it relieved him, for it enabled him to account for the sudden change in Basil Kindred's manner which had so perplexed him. It also served to account for a change he had observed in Minnie. It was not that she was less friendly towards him; on the contrary, she had on many occasions been more tender to him than usual. But the frank cordiality of her manner was gone; she was more reserved, and an engrossed expression, evidently born of painful thought, had settled upon her face. Dan had watched it with the sensitive eyes of love, wondering what had brought it into her face. Now he knew the cause: her father's illness brought gloomy forebodings to her heart and made her anxious. 'Does she ever think that I love her?' thought Dan, 'and that I am only waiting for the proper time to tell her that my life is devoted to her?' He would have spoken that very day, but a sentiment of true delicacy restrained him. The feeling that closed his lips upon the subject for the present could not have existed in any but a chivalrous nature.

When Joshua came home in the evening, Dan told him what the doctor had said. Joshua was silent for a little while before he spoke. 'It is

very singular,' he then said, 'that what you have told me should make me easier in my mind. Both Minnie's and Mr. Kindred's manner lately have given me great pain, filling me with uneasiness, which I have vainly struggled against. It is made clear to me now.'

'Why, that was also my feeling, Jo,' exclaimed Dan almost gaily. 'Another proof of the sympathy between us.'

'I shall go and see Mr. Kindred. I am ashamed of myself to have allowed such small feelings to exist. I ought to have made more allowance for his sufferings.' His hand was resting upon Dan's shoulder. He inclined himself so that he could see the face of his friend. 'And Minnie?' he asked in that attitude. 'How is it with you and her?'

'I am more hopeful than ever, Jo; but it would not be right for me to speak to her in her trouble.'

'That is like you, Dan,' said Joshua approvingly. 'Ever tender—ever considerate—ever just. No; you must not speak until Mr. Kindred is better. You must wait.'

Dan nodded assent, and Joshua went upstairs to Basil Kindred's room. He paused at the door

and listened. No sound came from within, and he received no answer to his knock. He opened the door softly. The room was in darkness.

‘Who is there?’ was asked in the abstracted voice of one just aroused from sleep.

‘It is I—Joshua. Shall I get a light?’

‘No;’ with a sudden fierceness. ‘What brings you here?’

The want of friendliness in Basil Kindred’s voice was very painful to Joshua, and it was only by a great effort that he was enabled to maintain his composure. ‘What is the meaning of this, sir?’ he asked, very gently.

‘Of what?’

‘Of your changed manner towards me, sir. And not to me only, but to all of us. Have we done anything wrong—have *I* done anything wrong? If I have, it has been done unconsciously, and it is but just that you should not leave me in ignorance of my fault. I came up to you now, sir, to ask that we should be to each other as we once were—as we were before I went to sea—as we were on the first day of our meeting, when you said, “God bless you, Joshua Marvel.” I have never forgotten that, sir. I do not speak to you for myself alone; I speak for all of us,

who hold you, I am sure, in the tenderest respect and regard.' Joshua spoke feelingly, and his words had the effect of softening Mr. Kindred's manner.

'You are right,' he said softly and very slowly; 'it is not just. Sit here by my side.' Joshua sat where he was bidden, and waited for Mr. Kindred to resume. 'Distemper of the mind accompanies distemper of the body,' continued the sick man, 'and you must lay some part of my unfriendliness to that cause. I am sick in body, and therefore peevish, and therefore, perhaps, unjust. Sick men have sick fancies. They magnify straws, even as, lying here in the dark, I can, by the power of my will, magnify the shadows that rest within this room, and make them "palpable to feeling as to sight." Joshua Marvel, I owe you much; you saved me and mine from starvation. I am glad that you are here now, and that you met my fretfulness with patience; for there is that within my mind, not newly born, but newly risen, that I would gladly not forget again. All the happiness of the last few years I owe to you, for it was for your sake we were welcomed here.'

'The pleasure your society has given to all

those dearest to my heart, sir, is recompense a thousand fold.'

'Those dearest to your heart!' repeated Basil Kindred musingly. 'Who are they?'

'You ought to know, sir,' replied Joshua, surprised at the question.

'It is but a whim—a sick man's whim—but tell me: of all those dearest to your heart, whom would you place first? Do not hesitate to answer me. We are in the dark, and I cannot see your face.'

'In the dark or in the light, before all the world, if it were necessary, I could name but one, whom you know well.'

'Still, to satisfy me, name her.'

'Ellen, sir. You know that she is to be my wife.'

'I have heard so. Take my hand. I wish you the happiness that faithful love deserves. No worldly happiness can be greater. It makes a heaven of earth, in whatever sphere of life it comes. And if, as it was with me, the partner of your faithful love is called away before you, the remembrance of her goodness and purity will dwell for ever in your heart, like a divine star.' His voice had grown so solemn, that Joshua could

only press his hand in reply. Presently Basil Kindred spoke again. 'Your past life should be a guarantee for the future. You have been faithful in your friendship; you should be faithful in your love.'

'You do not doubt it, sir?'

'I cannot doubt it; your conduct gives doubt the lie. The shadows seem to be clearing away. I have much to say yet, if you will sit with me a little while.'

'I am glad to do so, and happy to hear you speaking to me again in your old kind manner.'

'It is so hard to reconcile,' mused Basil, speaking as much to himself as to Joshua. 'From whom can the accusation have come? And the motive—what can be the motive? Joshua, answer me—have you an enemy?'

'No, sir, not one that I know of.'

'Reflect a little. Can you bring to mind any circumstance that occurred during the years that you have been away to induce you to suppose that some one is conspiring to do you injury?'

'I am more than surprised at your question, sir; I am grieved that you should ask it, and apparently with reason. To my knowledge I have not a bad friend in the world.'

‘Your surprise is natural,’ said Basil; ‘but though you may think my remarks strange, do not think they are prompted by unkindness. I have good reasons for what I say. I hold this conversation sacred, Joshua. As it may be the last we shall ever have, let what is said between us be said in perfect confidence.’

‘Agreed as to that, sir; but you must not say that this is the last conversation we shall ever have.’

‘When do you go to sea again?’ asked Basil Kindred, taking no heed of Joshua’s remonstrance.

‘In less than a fortnight. We set sail first for Sydney, New South Wales, then for China, then for home. A short trip. We shall not be away long this time.’

‘Before you return, I shall have gone on a longer voyage than you are about to take. Nay, do not interrupt me. I have received warning—bodily, not spiritual, and therefore not open to doubt. It is impossible that I can live much longer. And with this conviction strong within me, I am tortured by an anxiety that racks me with a mightier pain than that which even as I speak pierces me to the marrow.’

Joshua was profoundly shocked at the dis-

closure; he had not thought it was so bad as that. Instinctively he knew what the anxiety was by which Basil was tortured, and Basil answered his thought.

‘You guess what my anxiety springs from. What will become of Minnie when I am gone?’

If he had seen! If in that darkened room a vision had appeared to answer him, could he have believed that it would come to pass? But silence was his only answer for a time; for Joshua was revolving in his mind whether it would be wise and merciful—whether he had any right to speak to Basil Kindred about Dan’s love for Minnie. The conversation between them was sacred and confidential, and the sick man’s tone when he spoke of the bodily warnings he had received was so impressive, that it carried conviction with it. It would be like speaking to a dying man, and it would be serving his friend.

‘That is my great anxiety,’ continued Basil; ‘were my mind relieved upon that point, I should fear nothing, for death is my smallest terror. I suffer deserved misery when I say that even I, her father, do not know her nature thoroughly, and that I fear to think to what extent her impulse might carry her. But I know that she needs guid-

ance, and that she cannot control herself. I have taught her ill, or rather have not taught her at all. I have been remiss in my fatherly duty—not intentionally, God knows! But I see it now—I see it now.’ Even in the dark he turned his face from Joshua, the more completely to hide his tribulation. ‘There is but one duty she can understand—the duty of love. She knows no higher. She comprehends that, because it is instinctive. She has her mother’s devoted nature, and would sacrifice herself for the only duty she can comprehend, as her mother sacrificed herself for me. But she could not be made to understand that under certain circumstances love may be sinful.’

Joshua, following his train of thought, heard Basil’s words, but scarcely understood their sense. Still he said,

‘She loves you, sir.’

‘Yes, she loves me as a father, and by that love I have unconsciously controlled her. But that power has gone from me. Our minds are strangers; they used not to be so. Once she hid nothing from me; now as I watch her I see in her eyes the attempt to hide her thoughts, and I cannot express to you my agony in knowing that her heart and mind are not open to me, as they

have hitherto been. If I knew—if I only knew—I should be satisfied; for then I might protect her. Sometimes I think that another kind of love has come to her, and has shadowed the love she bore for me. But for whom? Do you know?

He asked the question in a singular tone of fierceness and entreaty; but Joshua was thinking of Dan, and did not reply. Have I the right to speak? he thought; and an affirmative answer did not come clearly to his mind.

‘You are silent,’ continued Basil in a quieter tone. ‘Are you concealing anything from me?’

‘What should I conceal from you, sir?’ asked Joshua in reply, after a pause.

Basil Kindred sighed, as the words so hesitatingly spoken came from Joshua’s lips.

‘Young men are often thoughtless in their actions,’ he said mildly, as if wishful to rob the remark of direct significance; ‘they do not know the depth and earnestness of some womanly natures. Listen, I will tell you my story; it may be a lesson and a warning to you.’

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE'S SACRIFICE.

WHEN I was a young man, I was an enthusiast. My mother had died when I was a child. My father was a clergyman, and wished to educate me for the Church. But my heart was not in my studies, and I did not satisfy his expectations. I was too fond of poetry and plays, my tutors told him; sterner studies were distasteful to me, and they met with nothing but disappointment from so unwilling a pupil. I was also difficult to control; would indeed submit to no control. On several occasions when a company of players came to the place in which I was being educated, I had stolen away to the theatre, remaining there until nearly midnight. My tutors spoke the truth. From the first night that I stepped inside the walls of a theatre and saw a tragedy, my fate was fixed. I was fascinated, entranced. I had never conceived anything so grand, so noble, so heroic.

Mine was a pure passion ; glitter possibly had its effect upon my mind, but no base ingredient was mixed with my determination to become an actor. What nobler calling could there be than that which clothed the noblest of all the arts with living fire, which made dead heroes speak and move and live again ? My father received the report with displeasure. He looked upon a theatre as the abode of all the vices. He spoke to me and expostulated with me, and I argued with him until I angered him. Then he took me from school, and kept me at home, so that he might wean me from my wicked notions. I had not been home a month before a company of players paid our town a visit. I was a-glow with excitement. My father warned me not to go ; I told him frankly that I would. He locked me in my bedroom ; and I made a rope of the sheets, and let myself out of the window. I came home late, and my father opened the door for me. He was so strict a disciplinarian, that my disobedience was a crime in his eyes. He told me so sternly, and told me also that unless I complied with the rules of his house, and with his commands as a father, I must find a home elsewhere. He had other children, and he declared that I should not contaminate them by my

example. When I ventured to expostulate with him, he stopped me peremptorily. There was no sign of tenderness in his manner. He was harsh and hard. He forgot that I inherited some share of his own determination, and that I was as likely to be immovable in my ideas as he was in his. I felt that I could have answered him by arguments as forcible as his, and, with the not uncommon egotism of youth, I believed that I could have convinced him. But he would not listen to me, and I was compelled to sit silent and inwardly rebellious while he laid down the hard rules by which my life was to be guided. The glittering splendour of the play I had witnessed that night was vivid to my mind while his cold words fell upon my ears. The tragedian upon whose musical impassioned utterances I had hung entranced, was one of the greatest that ever trod the stage; the play I had seen was one of the grandest of England's grandest poet. What! was it a crime to come within the influence of such a teacher? I could not believe it; I would not believe it. My father said my inclinations were sinful, impious, misbegotten, and preached to me sternly, uncompromisingly, until my heart—beating with indignation at his injustice—was as hard to him as

his was to me. Then he left the room with a cold good-night, and I went to bed. But before I went to sleep, I took from my box the volume of Shakespeare containing the play that I had seen, and as I read the noble verse, the men and women who took part therein came and inspired me with the nobility of their speech.

On the ensuing Sabbath my father preached against play-houses and players. It is not necessary for me here to dilate upon his arguments; they were the common arguments generally used against actors and their abominations. Players were creatures of the devil, working in his service for the damnation of souls. There was no heaven for them; by their lives they earned damnation, and they received their wages in another life. It was a strong sermon—‘a beautiful sermon,’ as I heard many men and women say to each other as they walked from the place of worship; but it filled me with indignation. It was a challenge thrown out to me, and I accepted it. I do not attempt to justify what I did; but it seemed to me as if I should be false to myself if I did not do it. On the following evening I went to the theatre early, and secured a seat in the most conspicuous position, and sitting there the whole

night through, I applauded with more than my usual enthusiasm, and even—perhaps I should be ashamed to say it—with purposed demonstrativeness. It was like giving the lie to my father's teaching; but I did not think of it then in that light. I was bound in honour to a certain course of action, and I pursued it. When the play was over, I walked about the town for an hour, filled with fervent passionate admiration for what I had witnessed. It was past midnight when I knocked at my father's door. No answer came. I knocked again. Still no answer. I was standing in perplexity as to what I should do, when a piece of paper fluttered on to the pavement from a window above. I picked it up, and saw that it was addressed to me. It was in my father's handwriting, and it told me in a few simple words that, as I had chosen to commit a sinful outrage upon his cloth, and upon his sermon of the previous day, he disowned me as a son and cast me off. A postscript was added, to the effect that, upon my calling at or sending to a certain place every week, I could receive a small sum of money sufficient to keep me from want, but that if I adopted the stage as a calling, the money would be withheld. In the event of my adopting the

stage, my father asked me as a favour to change my name. I never received a farthing of the money ; I would have died rather than have taken it. I started that night from my native town, and I have never seen one of my family since.

I need not dwell upon the details of the next few years. The recollection is too painful to me. When I walked away from my father's house, I solemnly resolved never to set foot in it again ; I renounced all claims of kindred, and said to myself proudly and confidently, ' I am alone in the world, without friends, without family. I am free to adopt what course of life I think best. I will show my father, by my career, that I am right, and he is wrong.' I changed my name to the name by which you know me. Speaking to you as I am speaking now, with the solemn darkness around us, with something like a sense of death upon me, I cannot hide from you anything that comes to my recollection. The simple reason for my changing my name was, that it laid my father under an obligation to me. The motive was unworthy ; but it is hard to reconcile the lofty aspirations and the despicable sentiment that in the same moment may animate a single mind. Well, I marched into the world friendless and

unknown, filled with an arrogant courage, almost with defiance. I had a watch and a little money ; I sold my watch to increase my wealth, and before I had spent my last shilling, I gained admission to a company of players, and commenced life as an actor. I had seen these actors on the stage, and had been inspired by them ; but my amazement was great when their private lives were open to me. The men and women who had inspired me were poor struggling creatures, living almost begging lives, and suffering incredible hardships. The salaries they were supposed to receive were barely sufficient to pay for food and lodging ; but the money that was taken at the doors of the theatre was often of such trifling amount, that at the end of the week the players were compelled to be content with half, ay with a fourth the sum due to them. They all shared alike ; there was none among them who took the lion's share while the others starved. The leading tragedian received a guinea a week, and was thankful when he got it. I have seen him play Macbeth, knowing that he had not tasted food since breakfast ; and have seen him come off the stage at the end of the play and faint, not from enthusiasm and excitement, but from sheer hunger. From this

you can form some idea of my sufferings; but I never wavered. I was indomitable in my resolve. Disenchanted as I was to some extent, I saw fame and glory before me, and I followed the beckoning shadows that lured me on. And then I saw so much to admire in the lives of my poor companions—so much self-sacrifice, so much devotion, so much virtue—that I was proud to suffer with them. ‘Children of the devil,’ I had heard my father call them. A strong resentment against him possessed me when I became a witness of their privations patiently borne, of their self-sacrifices cheerfully made. All this while—though I endured hunger and every species of worldly misery; though I had to walk, many and many a time, forty, fifty, and sixty miles, through wet and mud, in boots and shoes that scarcely held together; though I often slept in the open air, by the side of hay-stacks and under hedges—all this while I was advancing in my profession, and enthusiastically believed that the day would come when I should be famous and prosperous. So I grew to be a man, more firmly hoping, more firmly believing. I was what is called leading man; I was at the head of my profession, and was only waiting for the tide—being prepared for it—that was to lead me to

fame and fortune. But young as I was, the life I had led had already destroyed my constitution. Rheumatism had planted itself firmly in my bones, and want of nourishing food had so weakened me, that I felt like an old man. It was only the fire of enthusiasm that sustained me. I believed myself to be what I represented at night; I lost all consciousness of my poor self while I was acting; and would often come from the theatre with the dream strong upon me, and in my sleep weave fancies sufficiently bright and beautiful to recompense me for the material hardships of my working life.

I was at the height of my powers, when it was both my happiness and my misery to come to a town where we had arranged to stop for a fortnight, and where I gained such honours in the shape of applause as had never before fallen to my lot. It was a prosperous town, and our two weeks' stay was so remunerative, that we thought it advisable to lengthen our visit. We stayed for six weeks—for six happy weeks. The place rang with my praises. I was a wonder, a genius; such acting had never been seen. Throughout the whole of my career, I had preserved my self-respect; what I suffered, I suffered in silence. I

complained to no one, and I never forgot my determination to prove, what perhaps my father might one day be forced to own, that an actor may be as good a man as a clergyman. Being therefore, in my habits of life, somewhat above my companions, and having been so successful in the town, I was courted by some of the townspeople, and received invitations to their houses. I was what is termed, I believe, a social success; and I was proud of it. Here was I, an actor, moving in as good society as was my father, a clergyman. Who was right now, he or I? During the second week of our stay, I was invited to an evening party; and as my part in the performance for that night would be finished by nine o'clock, I was enabled to accept the invitation. Fatal night—happy night! That night was the real commencement of my life; it shaped my career in this world, and it makes me look forward with joy unspeakable to the world beyond, where I shall rejoin the mother of my darling child. Her family were well born, and occupied a high position in the town. They were looked upon as leaders of fashion; and I learnt that night that they were among the principal patrons of the theatre, and that her father had passed the

highest encomiums upon me. They were not present at the party, and their daughter was accompanied by her aunt, an eccentric wealthy lady, with whom she resided during the greater part of the year. I had the good-fortune to find favour in the eyes of this lady, who had a passion for celebrities, and she invited me to her house. The invitation arose in this way: she had been to the theatre on the previous evening, and a gentleman in her company had taken exception to one of my readings. She mentioned it to me, telling me that she had insisted that I was right, and at the same time confessed to me that she had not the slightest idea upon the subject, and had been prompted to side with me only for the reason that the gentleman was the most insufferably-conceited person on the face of the earth.

‘He is not satisfied unless he is master in everything,’ said the old lady with wonderful warmth; ‘he is dictatorial, self-willed, ungenerous, and supercilious—so much so, that he will scarcely condescend to argue a point upon which he has expressed an opinion. Nothing would please me more than to be able to bring evidence against him respecting your reading.’

It so happened that my reading was the cor-

rect one, and that the emendation made by the gentleman was unsupported by authority. I told her so, and she was delighted.

‘But it will be of no use my telling him what you say,’ she said; ‘and it would not be proper to bring you together for the purpose of quarrelling about it.’

Then I suggested a way. I would consult two or three old editions of Shakespeare we had in the company, and have fair copies of the passage made from them, with any notes or annotations that might be attached to it. There was no occasion, I said, to let the gentleman know that I supplied the evidence; it would be sufficient for him to see the quotations and the authorities, and he would be able to test their correctness for himself. She thanked me warmly, and I frankly owned to her that I was almost as much interested in the matter as she was herself.

‘Ah, you are a student,’ she said, tapping me with her fan, ‘and are not actuated by such small motives as I am.’

I told her that it had been my nature, ever since I remembered myself, to be in earnest in what I did. Success could not be attained without earnestness, I said; and such a spirit was not

thrown away even when exhibited in the smallest matters. The old lady was pleased with my conversation, and asked me to bring the written quotations to her house the following day. She then introduced me to her niece.

Bear with me for a little while. When I commenced, I intended to be more brief, but I have been carried away by a tide of memories. These things that I have spoken of have dwelt in my mind, but mention of them has not passed my tongue; not even my daughter has ever heard from me the story of my life. All the memories that are dearest to me are stirred into life by my speech; and in the midst of the darkness in this room, where nothing human exists but ourselves, I see my wife as I saw her that night for the first time—as I shall see her soon in a better land.

Good and evil, consciously wrought, are not of this world alone; mind you that, Joshua Marvel. They bear their fruit hereafter. In what way or in what shape we do not know—but they bear their fruit. I never loved but one woman in my life, and never was false to her, even in thought. I never harboured an unworthy sentiment towards her. I loved her truly, purely, solely, as she loved me. If I had done her wrong, and, loving her,

had played false with another by a single act, by a single word of encouragement, even if it were weakly given in a moment of weakness, I could not look into this darkness as I do now without fear and shuddering.

(What was it that passed into the room? The deep darkness that prevailed, no less than the intense interest with which Joshua followed the course of Basil's story, prevented him from seeing. Yet it was no less certain that the door was gently opened, and that a person with noiseless footfall entered the room, and, wrapped in shade, stood silent in listening attitude.)

She loved me, and sacrificed herself for me. Loving me, she conceived it to be her duty to follow me; she forsook friends and family, and imperilled her good name for me; and in this solemn moment, when all the dearest memories of my life give life to my words, life to my thoughts, I bless her for it! Her devotion, unworldly as it was, was sanctified by love. There is no earthly sacrifice that love will not sanctify!

(A sound, half sigh, half sob, floated on the

air, but so light that Joshua doubted if he had heard it. It reached Basil's ears. Rising in bed, he clutched Joshua by the shoulder, and whispered in trembling tones, 'Can spirits speak, and make themselves heard? Did you hear anything?'

'Something like a sigh, I thought,' said Joshua; 'and yet it is not possible.'

Rising, he walked to the door; but whoever it was that had entered so noiselessly, had so departed.

'There is no one here; it must have been fancy.'

Basil sank down in the bed, exhausted by emotion, and it was long before he resumed his story. During the silence, Joshua thought of Ellen, and was happy. Such love as Basil Kindred had spoken of, Ellen had given to him. 'But she will not have to sacrifice herself for me,' he thought; 'hers and mine will be a happier lot, I hope.' Yet Basil's life was grand and noble. 'Like a great storm at sea,' thought Joshua, 'and two small boats, lashed together, contending against it vainly.' His thoughts were interrupted by Basil's voice.)

I need not describe her. Minnie is like her; but she was more beautiful even than Minnie. I

went to the aunt's house, and was a frequent visitor there. Alice and I loved each other from the first. How I won her pure heart, I do not know. I will not say I was unworthy of her ; for I was animated by a true ambition, and I was earnest and conscientious in all I did. I did not deceive her ; I told her exactly what I was, what I had suffered, and what I hoped to gain. She paid no heed to worldly matters ; she loved me, and that was enough. She sympathised with me in my ambition, and said it was a noble one. Her words were like wine to me ; they strengthened and encouraged me. During the last week of our contemplated stay in the town I was stricken down by rheumatic fever, and was confined to my bed for nearly two months. The other members of the dramatic company waited for me for a few days, hoping I would get well ; but I grew worse, and they were too poor to remain idle ; so they left without me, and I was alone in the place.

I was delirious for a long time, and knew no one about me. How well I remember the day when consciousness returned ! I opened my eyes, wondering where I was, and what had occurred yesterday to cause me to feel so deliciously weak ; but I could not understand it, and I lay contented

and happy, as if newly born into a world of peace and blissful repose. But as I lay—it might have been for a few moments or a few hours—a soft murmur of voices fell on my ear. I did not turn immediately in the direction of the sound; I was content to lie and listen to the murmur, and had no desire to analyse it—it so harmonised with my condition—there was such a sense of luxurious ease in it: it was like the soft lapping of the sea upon a shore of velvet sand! But with returning consciousness, my mind was gradually aroused into activity; and in the whispering of voices, a familiar note, sweeter and more musical than the rest, came to me. Lazily I turned my head, and saw my darling Alice. Our eyes met, and it was like a flash of light. I understood in that instant that she had been my ministering angel during my sickness. A look of pity and love was in her eyes as I turned to her, and she glided to my side and took my hand in hers.

‘Alice darling!’ I whispered. My voice was tremulous as a blade of grass in the summer air.

‘Dear Basil!’ she said in reply.

No heavenly happiness can be greater than that which entered my grateful heart at that moment.

All sense of sight and touch and hearing—all heart and soul and mind—were merged in the exquisite belief that enwrapt me then—in the faith that constituted itself a part of me, inseparable, indissoluble, that is mine through all time—that she and I were one for ever and ever! She sat with me until my landlady warned her that it was time to go. When she was gone, I learnt that not a day had passed since my sickness that she had not come to see me.

‘Alone?’ I asked.

‘Yes, alone,’ my landlady said, adding that she had not spoken to any one of the young lady’s visits, as they might have been misconstrued.

The significant tone in which she said this caused me to reflect that Alice’s visits, if discovered, would expose her to the world’s censure, and I begged my landlady to preserve silence upon the subject.

I will not linger upon this part of my story. Alice’s visits were discovered; and one day, when I was nearly well, and when I was sitting by the window waiting for her beloved presence, I received a visit from her aunt.

I saw the unpleasant news in her face directly she entered the room. She commenced by saying

she was glad to see I was nearly well, and that she trusted I would not take advantage of a young girl's indiscretion.

‘It was by the merest accident I discovered that my niece has been in the habit of coming to see you every day,’ said the old lady; ‘and she has been very rash and indiscreet; you must see that, I’m sure.’

I did not see it, and I told her so.

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed the old lady; ‘you are a man, and you know the ways of the world and its judgment. As a man of honour, you must not encourage my niece in her folly.’

‘Is it a folly to love?’ I asked.

But the old lady would not listen to argument, and she demanded my promise that I would not see my darling again.

Firmly I refused to give it, unless Alice asked me to do so. We were pledged to each other, I said, and it was out of my power to break the engagement, unless Alice wished it broken.

The old lady was terrified by my firmness; and when she asked me what I meant to do, and I told her that I meant to marry her niece, she exclaimed aghast,

‘Marry her! and you an actor!’

‘Yes; and I an actor,’ I answered proudly.

She kept with me for more than an hour, begging and entreating; but she could not move me. I was contending for what was dearer to me than life, and an old woman’s worldly arguments could not make me false to myself and to my love. She tempted me too—offered me money to leave the town. After that, I was silent; I would speak to her no more upon the subject. When she had exhausted herself, and rose to go, I opened the door for her; and before she went out, I thanked her for her hospitality to me, and expressed my regret that I should have been the means of causing her pain. She made no reply; but I fancied I saw a pitying expression on her face as she passed out.

I was overwhelmed by despair, and might have been guilty of I don’t know what extravagance, had not my darling foreseen my misery, and provided against it. Within an hour of the departure of Alice’s aunt, a note was given to me by my landlady. It was from my darling herself. She knew her aunt’s errand; she knew that I was true to her; and she told me not to lose heart, for she was mine, and mine only, and would be true to me till death. Truly, those

words were like oil upon the troubled waters : my mind was instantly composed, and a deep peace and joy fell upon me. The last words of her little note were to the effect that she would find means to write to me again soon ; and she begged me not to go away until she saw me.

So I waited, and grew strong ; and time passed, until there came an evening when we met — met never to part again. It was a solemn meeting : there was no hesitation on one side, or entreaty on the other. We walked up and down in the rear of a woodside inn ; and my landlady, whom I had asked to accompany me, stood a little distance from us. My darling told me that her family were about to take her to the Continent, and that she saw no way of resisting.

‘There is one,’ I said. And as I said this, I stood by the side of an old elm, and she stood with drooping head before me. ‘There is one. We are pledged to each other till death. If I parted from you now in the belief that we should not meet again, I would pray to God to end my life here where I stand.’

‘Tell me what I shall do,’ she answered, ‘and I will do it.’

‘Follow me,’ I said. ‘Share my life, hard though it may be. Be mine, as I am yours. Let us walk together till death, and after it.’

She placed her hand in mine, and answered me in the words of Ruth, and I folded her to my breast, and kissed her.

So, accompanied by my landlady, we turned our backs to the town where we first met, and the next day we were married.

Ah, how happy we were, and how our lives seemed spread before us like a bright holiday, which was to be spent in a land where the air was always sweet—where the flowers were always blooming! No thought of winter; but it came, with its frost and snow, and racked me with a renewal of the old pains. I could have borne them cheerfully, if they had not sometimes prevented me from working. We fell into poverty; and through all its bitterness she never complained, and never gave me one word of reproach. Nay, often and often, when she saw that my sufferings were increased by the thought that I had asked her to share my poor life, she comforted me and cheered me with tender speech, that fell like balm upon my soul. I struggled on in my profession, gaining applause always, but never

seeming to mount a step nearer to the goal where fame and fortune stood beckoning me. My wife had written to her family without my knowledge ; but not one of them replied except her good aunt, who sent her a small sum of money. When Minnie was born she wrote again, but the old lady was dead. Still, somehow we managed : our wants were small, and our happiness was perfect. We had to travel about a great deal ; and when we had not sufficient money to pay our coach-fares, we walked, and made the way light for each other by cheering words. Many scores of miles have I—the great tragedian, as they called me in the bills—carried our little Minnie in my arms, lulling her to sleep, or pointing out to her the beauties of nature, as they peeped at us out of hedgerows, or as they sprang up in the gardens of great mansions, where they were not hidden by grim walls, as if their owners were jealous lest the poor toilers on the road should enjoy their lovely forms and colours. Now and then we got a lift on a wagon, and the music of the bells on the horses' necks often lulled Minnie to sleep. We seldom stayed in one place longer than a fortnight ; but once we stopped in a town for nearly four months, playing three nights a

week. That was a happy time. I used to come home from the theatre when my work was done, and Alice and I would sit in our humble lodgings until late in the night, talking of such matters as were nearest to our hearts; painting the future in bright colours, and weaving fancies about our Minnie, who would sometimes be lying awake on her mother's lap, and whose little fingers would clasp one of mine as the ivy clasps the oak. We made many friends—false friends most of them, attracted by my wife's beauty—friends whose speech was fair, but whose thoughts were treacherous. But rocks on which many a woman's good name and happiness have been wrecked melted like snow before my wife's purity. And still we struggled on, hoping against hope, until there came a time which cast a shadow on me never to be removed except by death. It was in the autumn of the year. My wife had been ill, and I had to nurse her and carry her about, and study and work, while my heart was almost breaking; for the doctors had told me she required wine and nourishing food, and I was earning barely sufficient to pay for the commonest necessities. One night when I left the theatre, the rain was pouring down like a second deluge. I had been

playing the principal parts in tragedy and comedy, and I came into the street hot and flushed with my exertions. It was the last night I ever played. The rain soaked me to the skin ; but I took no heed of that ; I was too anxious to reach home. I crept into our one room, and found my wife asleep. I sat by her side and looked at her pale face, and recalled the past. I saw her as she had been five years before, a bright and beautiful girl ; and as she was now, pale and wan as a ghost. I heard her whisper, 'Until death, Basil—until death !' I threw myself on my knees by the bedside, and hid my face on the bed in utter prostration ; and while I knelt, my body turned cold as ice, then hot as fire, and a feeling like the feeling of death came upon me. '*Is it death ?*' I asked myself ; and I almost rejoiced at the thought that we might pass away together. When I raised my head, the room seemed to be thronged with visible fancies. The light and brilliancy of the theatre ; the dark night with its downpour of rain ; Alice as she was when I first met her ; my father's study, and he and I looking defiantly at each other : all these pictures, and many others, were before me, and for a moment seemed to be in harmony with each other. Unutterable con-

fusion among them followed; and then a darkness fell upon me.

Weeks passed before the darkness cleared away. When I recovered my senses, I found my patient angel nursing me, although she was scarcely stronger than I was. But what will not a woman's love accomplish? We were not in the same town in which I had fallen sick. She had removed me to a village some twenty miles distant from my native place. I did not discover this until I was able to rise and move about. I was but a shadow of myself; all my strength had left me, and I was like a child. I was to discover something worse than that. I was to discover that my memory was gone, and that, although I could repeat snatches of parts I had played, I could not, study as hard as I would—and I tried diligently during my convalescence—get the complete parts into my head. My wife helped me—looked at the book while I stumbled on—prompted me, encouraged me, bade me rest for a day and try again. All in vain. If I was rehearsing the scenes in Hamlet, speeches and lines uttered by Macbeth and Lear interpolated themselves, and I grew hopelessly confused.

So, then—my occupation was gone; my ambi-

tion was at an end. The knowledge would have been bitter enough to bear had I been by myself; but there were my wife and daughter, my darling Minnie, my patient suffering Alice, to provide for, and I in debt, without a penny in the world, and without any means of driving white-faced hunger from my dear ones. The despairing conviction almost brought on a relapse, and it was only by the strongest effort of will that I kept my senses. But I could not get strong; rheumatism had fastened itself too firmly in my bones, and would not be driven away; and I was afflicted with distressful shudderings and with feverish attacks, during which I knew no one about me. Winter was coming on fast. Every atom of clothing that could be spared had been sold by my wife; what she must have suffered, dear angel! can never be told. Was it my selfishness or blindness that prevented me from seeing death written in her face? I did not see it—I did not suspect it—until the time when her cold body lay before me. She suffered—yes; she could not disguise that from me; but the pleasant smile and the cheerful look of content and hope with which she always answered my wistful gaze, blinded me to her condition and to the ex-

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tent of her sufferings. I did not ask her why she had brought me to the village—I guessed that it was because I had known it in my happier days, and because it might induce me to think of my father, and of the advisability of asking help from him. She did not say a word upon the subject. She knew the story of my boyish life, and was content that I should do as I thought best. But she was a mother as well as a wife, and she deemed it to be her duty to bring me where, if I so pleased, I might possibly obtain assistance. I thought over it, and, bitter as it was, I saw that my duty lay clear before me. I would sacrifice my pride and humble myself to my father. And yet I hesitated—hesitated until one morning my wife came into the room looking so strange that I passed my hand before my eyes, wondering if I were awake.

‘Alice!’ I cried.

She came to my side with a cheerful look. Her beautiful hair, that had hung down to her waist, was gone. I took her upon my knee, and folded her in my arms, and sobbed like a little child. She soothed and comforted me.

‘It will grow again,’ she said, knowing but too well that before that time came she would

be beneath the daisies. 'The landlady wanted money, and everything was sold but that. See, I can pay her.'

'All?' I asked.

'No, not all,' she said cheerfully; 'but perhaps some good fortune will come to us.'

That morning I wrote to my father. I told him that I was married to a gentlewoman, noble, good, and pure, that we had a child, and that I was ill and in want. But no answer came. I wrote again, begging him to reply and to assist us. Still no answer. And meanwhile my wife was fading before my eyes, and our landlady clamoured for what was due to her. O, if I could have sold my blood for money, I would have done it, when I heard her coarse tongue revile my wife! I tottered into the passage.

'Woman!' I cried, 'you shall be paid. I will go and get money.'

'Where?' asked my wife in a faint voice.

'At my father's,' I answered. 'Come, we will go and lay our sorrows at his feet.'

I took Minnie in my arms, and we started in the direction of my native town. It was not until we had walked four or five miles that we discovered how weak we were. We were penniless

and hungry, and Minnie was crying for food. I went into a public-house, and begged for some. I was turned out without ceremony; but a common woman, who was drinking with a tinker, ran after me—God bless her for it!—and put a biscuit into Minnie's hand. We struggled on. A mile nearer. My wife grew white in the face, and her lips were black. And as I looked at her, there came by her side the image of what she was, ruddy, bright-eyed, rosy-lipped. I saw it, I tell you. The impalpable shape of the beautiful girl, radiant with health, walked with light step by the side of the careworn haggard-faced woman. I must have been crazed. She saw in my face the disturbed condition of my mind.

‘Courage!’ she whispered, taking my arm.

I laughed, and looked around. Fortunately, no one was near us, or I should have robbed him—weak as I was, despair would have given me strength. I have asked myself since, if it would have been a crime, and have not found the answer. Ten miles were compassed when a storm came on—a dreadful pitiless storm, in which the slanting wall of rain before us seemed to shut out hope. We toiled through it, fainting from weariness and hunger; we toiled through it, until I fell prone to

the earth. My wife knelt by me in the wet grass, and implored me to make another effort for her sake, for our child's. I tried to rise, but could not. All that I could do was to drag myself to a clump of trees, where I lay exhausted. Every word that passed between us from that time is too deeply engraven on my mind ever to be forgotten.

‘Wife,’ I said, ‘the struggle is over. Kiss me and forgive me.’

In the midst of her agony, a sweet smile irradiated her face. I could not see it, but I knew it was there by her voice.

‘Forgive you, husband!’ she exclaimed, as she kissed me. ‘We have nothing to forgive each other. Pity and love are all that I feel now. Love for you and our darling Minnie’—and she placed our little darling's hand on my aching eyes—‘and pity for your great sufferings.’

Not a word of herself! Her pure unselfish nature was triumphant over all. As surely as we have hands to feel and eyes to see, such love as hers is heaven-born, and dies not with the flesh!

‘Rest here,’ she said, placing our child in my arms. ‘I will go and seek help. Keep up your heart while I am gone.’

I had no power to stop her, and she left me and was lost in the gloom. Hours must have passed, though it was night when I awoke. I had fallen into sleep, and in my dreams all the circumstances of my life played their miserable parts; from the dawn of my ambition down to the words of my wife, 'I will go and seek help. Keep up your heart while I am gone.' When those words were uttered, I followed my wife, in my dream, as she stumbled on through the darkness. Suddenly I lost her; then a whisper of pain stole upon me, and I heard her murmur, 'Come to me, Basil; I am dying.' A strength born of fear enabled me to rise shuddering to my feet. 'Alice!' I cried. No voice answered me, but I still seemed to hear the echo of the words, 'Come to me, Basil; I am dying.' With Minnie in my arms, I followed the sound. Some wonderful chance directed my steps aright. How far I walked, I do not know. The rain was still falling, but there was a glimmering light in the sky to guide me. The trees, past which I crept painfully and wearily, were bare of leaves; their naked branches were emblematical of the desolation of my heart. I crept onward until I came to a spot where I saw a form lying on the ground. No need to tell me whose form it was

that I saw before me. No sound came from the lips, no sign of life was observable in the limbs. The ghostly echo of the cry, 'Come to me, Basil; I am dying!' died away upon the wind as I fell by the side of my darling, who had sacrificed her life for me. I raised her head on my lap, and looked into her white face. The eyelids quivered, opened; a look of joy leaped into her eyes.

'O my darling, my darling!' I wailed; 'wait for me.'

I inclined my head to her lips, for they were moving.

'I will wait for you, Basil. There!' and she looked up to heaven, while the cruel rain poured down upon her face.

I placed Minnie's lips to hers, and the child clasped her little arms round her mother's neck.

'Live, Basil,' she said slowly and painfully, 'live for her. No, no!' fearing that I was going from her; 'do not leave me yet!'

Her fingers tightened on mine, and she closed her eyes. I leant over her to protect her from the rain. In that supreme moment of sacrifice a smile rested on her lips.

'Till death, and after it, Basil, my love!' she whispered.

And her soul passed away into the wintry night.

‘You are crying,’ said Basil Kindred, after a long pause. ‘My story has touched your heart. I have told it to you for the purpose of opening your eyes to Minnie’s nature. She is like her mother, without her mother’s teaching. She is a wild flower; the impulse of her mind is under the control of the impulse of her heart. She is oblivious of all else, defiant of all else. Those of her friends who have the consciousness of a higher wisdom than she possesses—those of them who can recognise that the promptings of such a heart as hers may possibly lead her into dangerous paths—must guide her gently, tenderly. If any betray her, he will have to answer for it at the Judgment Seat. Joshua, you said to me, when you entered this room, that you had not forgotten the blessing I gave you on the first day of our meeting. I repeat that blessing. In all your actions that deserve blessings and prosperity, I say, God bless and prosper you, Joshua Marvel! Now leave me.’

Joshua’s face was wet with tears, and his

heart was throbbing with sympathy for Basil as he walked downstairs. In the passage he heard a footfall that he knew to be Minnie's. It was too dark to see her face.

‘Is that you, Minnie?’

‘Yes, Joshua,’ she answered, in a low voice.

‘You have been sitting with father.’

‘Yes.’

‘I have been wishing to speak to you, and I was afraid I might not get the opportunity, for father is very strange to me. When does your ship sail, Joshua?’

‘In a very few days, Minnie.’

‘I should so much like to see it, if there was no harm in my coming.’

‘What harm can there be, Minnie?’ exclaimed Joshua. ‘Come to-morrow to the docks at twelve o'clock when the men are at their dinner. Bring Ellen or Susan with you, and ask for the Merry Andrew, and I will show you over it.’

‘Thank you, Joshua. Good-night.’

‘Good-night, Minnie.’

As their hands met, Susan, carrying a light, came from the kitchen. Joshua did not wish Susan to see the tears on his face, and he turned hastily away as she approached. But she did not

appear to notice either him or Minnie, as she passed to the upper part of the house; and the next moment Minnie glided away, and Joshua entered the room where Dan and Ellen were sitting.

The following day Joshua, looking over the bulwarks of the *Merry Andrew*, saw Minnie standing in bewilderment amidst the busy life and the confusion of bales and cases on the wharf. He was surprised to find that she was alone. He hastened to her side, and asked her why Ellen or Susan had not come with her, and received for reply that she had thought they were both too busy, and had not liked to ask them.

‘But you don’t mind my coming by myself, Joshua, do you?’ she said, looking into his face.

‘No,’ he said, returning her gaze. Her eyes were sparkling with youth and health, and her cheeks had a bright colour in them from the brisk walk she had taken in the crisp air. ‘But I would have preferred your not coming alone.’

‘I will go back rather than offend you.’

‘Offend me!’ he exclaimed. ‘You are a stupid to talk of offending me. And as for going back, that would be sheer nonsense now you have taken the trouble to come.’

It was impossible to look at her without pleasure; she was as beautiful as the spring. A good many of the sailors turned to take another peep at her, and thought what a lucky fellow the third mate of the *Merry Andrew* was to have such a lass as that to come and see him. But he was in luck's way right round, they said to each other as they walked along. Joshua, not wishing to submit Minnie to their prying looks — although, being human, he was proud of them a little bit, it must be confessed—took her hand to lead her up the gangway. It was not easy for Minnie to get aboard, and Joshua had almost to carry her.

‘How strong you are,’ she said, ‘to be able to carry a big girl like me! And this is your ship.’

‘It is lumbered up at present, Minnie,’ he said; ‘but when we are at sea, and the decks are cleared, and the sails are set, and we are flying along before a fair wind, it is a little better than this, I can tell you. I can smell the sweet spray now, as it comes dashing up.’ His nostrils dilated at the mere thought of the ocean, and involuntarily he passed his hand before his eyes, clearing away imaginary spray.

‘How beautiful it must be!’ exclaimed Minnie.

Joshua abated a little of his enthusiasm. ‘It’s

all very well in fine weather, when the wind and sea are kind; but you would be frightened at storms.'

'Not if you were on the ship, Joshua,' she said dreamingly, but in so soft and low a voice that he did not catch the words; yet he looked at her keenly; but she did not notice his gaze, for she was wrapt in thought, and her eyes were turned from him. So still did she stand, that Joshua touched her sleeve to attract her attention. She started, as if he had aroused her from sleep, and then they went over the ship together. She was very anxious to see everything, and they had a busy half-hour. The last part of the ship they went into was the saloon.

'Captain Liddle has been very particular about the saloon,' Joshua said, 'for his wife is coming with us this voyage. Here are their cabins—one for the captain and his wife, and this little one adjoining for her maid.'

Minnie peeped into the cabins, and wondered how ladies could live in such a dark place. Joshua had to explain that the cabins were dark because the ship was in dock, and that when they got out at sea there was light enough for anything. Then they ascended to the deck again, and Minnie

thanked Joshua and prepared to go. Just at that moment, Joshua saw—or fancied he saw—Susan standing on the wharf. She was standing quite still, and her eyes were fixed on the poop of the Merry Andrew.

‘Why, there’s Susan!’ he exclaimed; and, leaving Minnie on deck, he hurried down the gangway. But the woman was gone, and he could find no trace of her. He returned to Minnie in a state of perplexity.

‘I thought I saw Susan on the wharf,’ he said.

‘You must have been mistaken, Joshua,’ said Minnie; ‘she was hard at work at home when I left. If it had been Susan, she would not have gone away when you went towards her.’

‘I suppose I *must* have been mistaken. Good-morning, Minnie; take care of yourself going home.’

He led her down the gangway, and Minnie made her way, like a gleam of sunshine, among the throng of rough working men, who stood aside to let her pass, and sent admiring looks after her. During his work that afternoon Joshua thought much of her, and of her father’s anxiety concerning her. ‘Mr. Kindred is right,’ he thought. ‘Minnie requires gentle tender guidance; such

guidance as Dan can give her, and will have the right to do soon, I hope. She can have no better teacher, no wiser counsellor, than Dan !'

So he mused and worked, and saw no signs of the dark clouds that were gathering about him.

CHAPTER VII.

NEVER TO RETURN.

COULD a map be made of the mental life of a man whose career has been marked by the commonest of commonplace incidents, and from that map a tale were woven it would transcend in interest the most eventful story that can be found in the wonder-world of fiction. Space, matter, and all the abstract relations of the Great System, affect the meanest order of mind, and produce the strangest of contrasts between the outer and inner life of men. Not more strange perhaps, but certainly more beautiful, are the contrasts presented in men of a high order of intelligence. As in the case of Dan. Quiet as were the grooves in which his material life moved, compassed as it was by a few narrow streets, his ideal life was a romance. It glowed with poetic beauty, and was filled with graceful images: like a peaceful lake in whose waters are reflected the glories of grand sunsets and the delicate lines and colours of night clouds

and overhanging trees. Had it been Dan's fate to mix with the world, his sensitive nature would have rendered him the most unhappy of beings. The selfishness with which the world abounds, and with which he would have been brought in contact, would have made his life a misery. Wishful to see good in everything, he would have seen its reverse in so many things, that his enduring faith in the purity and goodness of those upon whom he fixed his affections might have been weakened. His friends were few, but all his heart was theirs, and no doubt of their truth found place in his mind. Not to suspect belonged to the nobility of his nature.

Otherwise, he might have found cause for suspicion in what was occurring around him. Three days before Joshua's final departure from home, Basil Kindred locked himself in his room, and denied himself and Minnie to every person but Susan. She, and she only, attended to his wants, and faithfully obeyed his wishes. To all inquiries the one answer received, through Susan's lips, was, that he was too ill to be seen, and that he required the constant attendance of his daughter, who could not leave his room. Even Mrs. Marvel could not shake his resolution, and was surprised

to find that Susan encouraged him, and would not assist her in her kind endeavours.

‘It is not good for Minnie,’ remonstrated Mrs. Marvel, ‘to be cooped-up in that room all day. She can nurse her father—it is only right she should—but her health will suffer if she does not have fresh air.’

‘Mr. Kindred knows what is best for himself and Minnie,’ returned Susan, in a voice that trembled despite her efforts to be firm. ‘He has asked me to nurse him, and to keep everybody out of his room until he is better; and I mean to do it. If I can’t do it here, I shall take him away where he won’t be disturbed.’

‘Let me go up and see him,’ persisted Mrs. Marvel. ‘I may be able to do him some good.’

‘You can’t do him a bit of good,’ replied Susan uncompromisingly, ‘and he won’t let anybody but me go into his room.’

‘Sick people don’t always know what is best for them, my dear. We are all of us very much distressed and anxious about Minnie and her father. They are more than friends to us, and perhaps you do not guess what Minnie is to——’ But Mrs. Marvel was stopped in her speech by a fierce exclamation from Susan. The good mother was

not sorry for the interruption ; she had been about to refer to Dan's love for Minnie, which her delicate and keen instinct had discovered, and the thought came to her that perhaps it would not be wise to speak of it. She was not the less surprised at Susan's agitation, and at the frightened look which immediately afterwards flashed into Susan's eyes—a look which asked, 'What have I said? Have I betrayed my trust?' But the next moment Susan resumed her determined manner, and no entreaties of Mrs. Marvel could move her. When Mrs. Marvel told her husband of the interview, he said he was sure that Basil Kindred was not right in his head, and that the best thing to do would be to let the sick man have his own way. As for Susan, Mr. Marvel said, she was always strange—they were a pair, she and Basil Kindred.

So no farther attempt was made by any of them to see Basil Kindred and Minnie until the day when Joshua was going to sea. On that day Joshua went to Basil's room, and knocked. Susan came out of the room into the passage, and stood with her back to the door.

'I have come to say good-bye,' said Joshua ;
'and I should much like to speak to Minnie and

Mr. Kindred before I leave. Go in, Susey, and ask him to see me.'

Susan returned the usual answer, but Joshua's entreaties caused her to waver. She reëntered the room, and Joshua heard Basil's voice speaking to her. Then Susan came out again, and said,

'Mr. Kindred is too ill to see you—he told me to say so.'

'And Minnie?'

'Minnie!' echoed Susan; and then in a low troubled voice, 'Minnie is asleep.'

Joshua was inexpressibly pained.

'I must be content, I suppose,' he said, sighing; 'but I am deeply grieved. Something seems to have come between us lately, and I shall go away leaving a mystery behind. I wonder sometimes if I am the cause of this estrangement. If I am, I hope all will be set right when I am out of the way.'

'I hope so,' said Susan, with a singularly earnest look.

'You hope so! Then I am the cause, and you believe it. Take care, Susan, that you are not assisting in bringing unhappiness among us.'

'It is for you to take care,' said Susan, with bitter emphasis, 'that you do not do so.'

‘What do you mean?’ asked Joshua, in amazement. ‘Tell me. I have a right to ask, Susan, for you will one day be my sister.’

Joshua had taken her hand as he spoke, but she snatched it from him angrily.

‘I can tell you nothing that you do not know,’ she said hurriedly. ‘If I am to be your sister, I have only one thing to say to you.’

‘Well?’ he inquired, in an offended tone, for he was angered by Susan’s manner.

‘Be true to Ellen,’ she said, with quivering lips and in a softer voice.

‘Is that your fear?’ he exclaimed almost gaily. ‘Be true to Ellen! Why, Susey, I love her with all my heart and soul. But there! words go for nothing. Time will show. Bid Minnie and Mr. Kindred good-bye for me, and say I was sorry I could not see them before I went away.’

He put out his hand, and mechanically she took it in hers; but she unloosed it immediately with a shudder, and left him abruptly. He was compelled to be content with that good-bye, unsatisfactory as it was, and he walked to his home, where Dan had been staying for the last few days, eating there, and sleeping in Joshua’s room. Sitting in their bedroom alone on those

last few nights, when all but themselves in the house were sleeping, the friends renewed their vows of faithful love, and spoke of many things in the future which both of them desired. In one of these conversations Joshua put into Dan's hands a written paper, which made Dan and Joshua's father masters of his small savings and of wages that would be due to him from the London owners of the Merry Andrew.

'In case anything happens to me,' said Joshua, in explanation.

'Not for any other reason, Jo,' said Dan, 'for I shall never want the money.'

'Father may want a little. It is all his and yours. As to your never wanting money, I wish I could feel sure of it.'

'You may, Jo; I am earning quite enough with my birds. Mr. Fewster gave me an order yesterday for four canaries thoroughly trained to do all the best and newest tricks.'

Joshua uttered a dissatisfied 'Hm!' at the mention of Mr. Fewster's name. Dan understood it, for Joshua had contracted what Dan said was an unreasonable dislike for Solomon Fewster. Now, in reply to a remonstrance from Dan, Joshua said,

‘But you don’t like him, Dan.’

‘I don’t know that,’ said Dan, considering. ‘When you put it to me so plainly, I am rather inclined to say I do like him; for I cannot give a reason for not doing so. I *can* give a reason for liking him; he buys my birds——’

‘And sells them at a profit, I’ll be bound.’

‘Perhaps; he has a right to do so, if he pleases. I did think at first that he bought them for himself, but of course I was mistaken. However, whatever he does with them, he buys them and pays for them; that’s enough for me. You could give as good a reason for liking him. He was kind to you when you were ill.’

‘O, yes; brought me jellies and things——’

‘And you ate them and relished them,’ said Dan, laughing.

‘I didn’t know that he had brought them, or I wouldn’t have touched them. I remember in one of our coasting trips we had a passenger on board who wrote for newspapers, and who was said to be a very clever man. Certainly he talked like one. He used to talk to me, as much perhaps because I was a good listener as for any other reason. Well, a favourite subject with him was what he called magnetic sympathy. He would

just have suited you, Dan! He said that the natural magnetism which makes persons like or dislike one another, without apparent reason, is never wrongly directed.'

'A kind of instinct,' remarked Dan reflectively.

'He said, too, that as there are certain things in chemicals that won't mix, being opposed in their natures, so there are persons who have natural antipathies——'

'And won't mix—like you and Mr. Fewster,' interpolated Dan.

'Just so. Besides that, I have a good many little reasons for not liking Mr. Fewster.'

'Firstly,' prompted Dan.

'He never looks me in the face.'

'Secondly.'

'He has a horribly smooth voice.'

'Thirdly.'

'He has flat feet — ugly flat feet. I shall always hate men with flat feet. Then everything about him shifts and shuffles. But don't let us talk about him any more. I can't keep my temper when he is in my thoughts.'

The conversation drifted into other subjects, and Solomon Fewster was dismissed.

It was Dan's whim to have all his birds on a table for Joshua's inspection on the morning of his friend's departure.

'Although we are men now, Jo,' he said, 'I should wish us to keep our boyish fancies fresh and green always in our hearts. There is plenty of room for them, notwithstanding that life is a more serious thing to us than it was.'

There they were, the modest linnets, the saucy tomtits, the defiant blackbirds, the handsome canaries. Among the latter were four which Dan pronounced to be 'real beauties;' they were of a beautiful orange colour, and the feathers in their tails and wings were of a deep black. These were the canaries which Dan had spoken of as having been 'ordered' for Solomon Fewster. As they were admiring them, Solomon Fewster's step was heard in the passage, and the man himself entered to wish Joshua good-bye. He was profuse in his good wishes, to which Joshua listened in silence, uttering no word but 'good-bye' as Fewster quitted the room. It so happened that, during the pauses in his expressions of goodwill to Joshua, Solomon Fewster looked at the canaries which Dan had purchased for him, and handled them with words of approval. When he was gone,

Joshua, who had thrown his handkerchief carelessly upon the table, said,

‘That man hates me, Dan, more than I hate him.’

‘My dear Jo,’ said Dan, ‘how can you be so fanciful?’

‘Forewarned is forearmed, Dan. I beg of you not to trust him; I beg of you not to believe he is anything but a cruel false man. He wishes me ill—else why do I instinctively shrink from the touch of his hand? He wishes me ill—else why is this?’ Joshua removed his handkerchief, and Dan saw one of his beautiful canaries dead upon the table. ‘As he talked to me with his smooth tongue,’ continued Joshua, ‘wishing me well in his hateful voice, he crushed the life out of this poor bird. Is that no sign of a false bad heart? Had his thoughts been as gentle as his words, would this have happened?’ Dan was silent; he could not defend Solomon Fewster by another word. ‘Let us say good-bye here, dear Dan. Mother and father are waiting for me, and many of the neighbours also, to give me God-speed in a better fashion and with kinder hearts than that cruel man. Good-bye, dearest friend. God send you all that your heart desires!’

‘Thank you, dear friend. You know the one thing I desire to render me perfectly happy—Minnie’s love. Say, “God speed you in that venture!” Jo.’

‘God speed you! Dan, it comes upon me now to ask you one question. You do not doubt me, do you?’

‘Doubt you, Jo! No, nor never can.’

‘The answer is from your heart. I should not have asked but that some things have distressed me lately, and I should indeed be unhappy if I thought you had the shadow of a doubt of me. It may be that our voyage will not be prosperous; it may be that I may never live to return. If I do not—nay, Dan, I am impelled to speak thus—if I do not, believe me to have been always the same to you. Believe that I never wavered in my love or my truth, and that to the last I held you in my heart, as I hold you now, gentlest, dearest, best of friends.’

Dan drew Joshua’s face to his and kissed it.

‘We are one, Jo,’ he said softly; ‘nothing can divide our hearts. God bless and protect you, and brink you safely back.’

The leavetaking between Joshua and his pa-

rents was of a very different nature from the last, when he was leaving home for the first time in his life. Then Mr. and Mrs. Marvel were beset with doubts as to whether the step Joshua was about to take was for the best. Now, these doubts were dissolved. He had gone on his venture a bright happy boy, and had returned a bright happy man. He had started on the lowest round of the ladder, and had already mounted many steps. Third mate already! What might he not attain to? They were proud of him, and with just cause. All the neighbours were proud of him, too; he was a prince among them. The family were quite a distinguished family in the neighbourhood, as having for their representative a young man who had been all over the world—a man who had not only seen the sea, but who had been on it. A little crowd of neighbours had gathered about the house to give Joshua a parting handshake. The information of their having gathered for that purpose was imparted to Joshua by his father with an air of pride.

‘I’ve lived in this neighbourhood for nearly fifty years, Josh,’ said George Marvel, ‘and I’ve never but once seen so many of the neighbours on the look-out at one time.’

‘When was that, father?’ asked Joshua, humouring his father’s vanity.

‘That was when a carriage with two white horses came through the street, and stopped in it for full five minutes. It was the first carriage that ever was seen here, and the last, for that matter. You remember, mother!’

‘Yes, George.’

‘I wish you could have stopped with us until the last minute, Josh,’ continued George Marvel; ‘but Mr. Meddler was so mightily anxious that you should spend to-night and to-morrow with him at Gravesend, that he couldn’t well be refused, being so good a friend. Do you think your ship will sail to-morrow?’

‘To-morrow or next day, daddy.’ And Joshua put his arm round his mother’s neck, and she looked up at her big son with affectionate pride.

‘In three or four months you’ll be among the savages again,’ observed George Marvel contemplatively and admiringly.

‘I shall see plenty of them, I daresay, father. They come down to Sydney from what the people call the interior.’

‘And they are black all over, eh, Josh?’ asked

George Marvel, who was never tired of a repetition of Joshua's adventures.

'A kind of brown-black rather,' answered Joshua, 'with eyes like pieces of lighted coal.'

'And not a bit of clothing?'

'An old blanket, some of them; nothing at all, a good many. A sailor gave one a pair of trousers, and the fellow tied them round his neck by the legs.'

'D'ye see what strange things there are in the world, mother, that we never knew of?' observed George Marvel to his wife. 'That comes of being a wood-turner all one's life. — Josh, if you have children, don't make wood-turners of 'em.'

'I won't, father,' said Joshua, laughing; 'but I'm not certain either that I'd make sailors of them.'

'There, father!' Mrs. Marvel could not help saying triumphantly, 'what do you say to that? Joshua is coming round to my old way of thinking.'

'Now, one would think,' said George Marvel, appealing to an invisible audience, 'that Joshua's done a bad thing by being a sailor.'

'Well, no,' said Joshua; 'I've nothing to

grumble at ; I've been very lucky, and I'm thankful for it. But it is a hard life for a common sailor. He's bullied here and buffeted there, and is obliged to be up at all times of the night and day sometimes, and he gets soaked and soaked until he hasn't a dry thing to put on. Then, when he's dead-beat and turns in, he hasn't been asleep an hour perhaps when all the watches are called on deck, and there he is again, half dead with sleep, wondering whether he is dreaming or not, till he is woke up with a vengeance by the water trickling down his back, and the wind blowing as if it would blow his eyes clean out of his head.'

Mrs. Marvel shivered with apprehension at Joshua's description ; and he with ready tact continued :

'But that's not often ; and even when an inexperienced man would suppose there was great danger, there really is none at all. For the most part, it is fair and beautiful ; and when you are bowling along under a steady breeze, with all sails set, surrounded by bright cloud and bright water, there isn't a more glorious life in the world. If you were to see the ship, mother dear, on a calm day, with the sails like birds' white wings, with

a deck as clean as this kitchen, and the sailors sitting about mending sails and splicing ropes, while the grand albatrosses are flying over us, and shoals of beautiful fish are leaping like deer in the sea—if you were to see it then, you would almost wish you had been a man, so that you might be a sailor. And through all “there’s a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft, to keep watch for the life of poor Jack.”’

‘Indeed, my dear,’ exclaimed Mrs. Marvel, satisfied with the sentiment of the quotation, though its meaning was not quite clear to her; ‘I’m glad to hear that.’

‘Dear old mother!’ said Joshua, in secret delight at her simplicity, kissing her.

‘But the best of it all is,’ said George Marvel, ‘it makes a man of you; your muscle’s like a bit of iron. Feel mine, Josh—like a bit of soft putty. That comes of being a wood-turner.’

‘Ellen and Mr. Meddler went down to Gravesend two hours ago,’ said Mrs. Marvel to Joshua, who was tying his accordion in his pocket-handkerchief.

Joshua nodded. Brave as he had intended to be, spasms were rising in his throat.

‘You have all your things, dear?’

‘Yes, everything.’

He turned to take a last look at the homely kitchen, noting in that momentary glance the position of every piece of furniture and of the crockery on the dresser. The yellow-haired cat was too old now to do anything but lie on the hearth before the fire; and Joshua stooped and patted its head. When he rose and put his hand on the back of a chair, it seemed to him as if that common piece of wood and every other inanimate thing in the room were familiar friends. The very shape of the room was dear to him. The dear old kitchen! how many happy hours had he passed in it! He could have knelt and kissed the floor, his heart was so tender. As it was, he touched the table and the mantel-shelf, over which the bright saucepan-lids were hanging, lovingly with his fingers, and with dim eyes walked slowly away. His arm was round his mother’s waist as they went upstairs to the street-door, and he put his face to her neck and kissed it—a favourite trick of his when he was a child. It brought to her suddenly the fancy that her son was a baby-boy still; and she caressed his curly head as a young mother might have done. Mr. Marvel of course was too manly to give way to such weak-

nesses ; but nevertheless he clasped Joshua's hand with a clinging fondness, and the tune he was humming in proof of his manliness came rather huskily from his throat. It was a triumphant moment for him when he opened the street-door, and stood on the step with his wife and Joshua ; for there in the street were many of his neighbours, who pushed forward to shake Joshua's hand, and to wish him God-speed ; while some of the women slyly gave him ' a lucky touch.'

' One word, dear mother,' said Joshua, drawing mother and father into the passage, whereat all the neighbours fell away, and turned their backs to the door, there being nothing there really worth noticing. ' Take care of my darling Ellen for me. And Dan too ; he may need it.'

' They are our children, Joshua, next to you,' said Mrs. Marvel.

' You think to yourself, when you are away, Josh,' said Mr. Marvel, with his finger in a button-hole in Joshua's jacket, ' " There is Ellen, my wife that is to be ; and there is Dan, my dearest friend ; and there is father and mother with them every day, loving them almost as much as they love me, and almost as proud of them." You think that, Josh, and you'll think right.'

‘I am sure of it. Once more, good-bye ; God bless you all !’

And so, with tender embraces, hearty neighbourly farewells, and waving of hands, Joshua, with his accordion under his arm, bade farewell to his dear old humble home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD SAILOR SETS MATTERS STRAIGHT.

HAVING made over the whole of his worldly property to Joshua and Ellen 'for better or worse,' it was reasonable that Praiseworthy Meddler should have considerable weight in the family council of the Marvels. The arrangement whereby Joshua left his home a day before his ship was to sail was entirely of the Old Sailor's making; he and he alone was responsible for it. Naturally enough, when he had at first proposed it, he had met with opposition — especially from Mrs. Marvel, who wished Joshua to remain with them until the last moment. But after a private conversation with the Old Sailor, she had yielded to his wish, and had even used arguments to induce Joshua's readier compliance. That being obtained, the Old Sailor informed them that he had a lady-friend at Gravesend, name Mrs. Eliza Friswell, who was a married woman herself with a family, and who kept a respectable boarding-house, with whom he

had arranged that Ellen should stay until the anchor of the *Merry Andrew* was weighed; substantiating his statement by a letter from Mrs. Eliza Friswell to Mrs. Marvel, in which Mrs. Eliza—as the Old Sailor called her—undertook to look after Ellen as ‘one of her own.’ On the morning of Joshua’s departure from Stepney, the Old Sailor, dressed in his best, and decorated with a bunch of flowers in honour of Ellen, had called for his pretty lass and had taken her away, leaving a message that if Joshua did not arrive at Gravesend exactly at the appointed time, Ellen had consented to run away with him—to wit, Praiseworthy Meddler—and get married. Very proud was the Old Sailor of his charge, and very tender and confidential was the nature of his communications to her as they made their way to Gravesend. What it was that made her blush and laugh and cry in turns—what it was that made her serious one moment and glad the next—was known only to themselves. Certainly no one was taken into their confidence until they arrived at Mrs. Eliza’s, when, with a fatherly kiss, he delivered Ellen into the charge of that estimable matron. Mrs. Eliza’s husband was a boatman: rough and strong as a boatman should be:

with a great red face and great red hands, and with a voice that rumbled from his great deep chest with such thunderous power as to render such a thing as a whisper physically impossible. He was the owner of a fleet of four boats, which had been bought and paid for in shrimps and watercresses, or at all events with the profits made by Mrs. Eliza out of those delicacies, which she purveyed to the easily-satisfied amorous British public, with stale bread-and-butter and an imitation of tea, at ninepence per head.

Praiseworthy Meddler was fraternising with Mrs. Eliza's husband when Joshua made his appearance. Mrs. Eliza's husband immediately sheered off, and the Old Sailor took Joshua in tow. In response to the Old Sailor's remark that he was late, Joshua, who felt very despondent, said that parting from those at home took a longer time than he had expected.

'Ay, my lad,' said the Old Sailor gravely, ' 'tis a hard word, good-bye, when said to those we love. A long time with Dan, I daresay now?'

'Yes, sir; but it didn't seem long. Time flies faster at some times than others.'

'Ay; flies fastest when we most want it to hold out. Mother and father all right?'

‘As right as may be, sir. Crying more now, I know by my own feelings, than when I was with them. Kept up for my sake, sir, to give me courage.’ And Joshua turned aside.

‘No need to be ashamed of your tears, my lad. Gentle thoughts and a gentle heart go together. Some people say ’tis unmanly to cry, but I wouldn’t give much for the man who never cried, or who wasn’t sometimes so near it as to feel a gulping in the throat. ’Tis as much crying, that is, as if the tears were rolling down his face. I’ve felt like it myself, I’m glad to say.’

‘You are very kind to me, sir.’

‘You deserve it, Josh, you deserve it, though I’ve a doubt that you’re a bit blind to some things.’

‘To what things, sir?’

‘Gently, my lad, gently. Plenty of time to talk.’

The gravity of the Old Sailor was contagious, and Joshua felt that the good old fellow was about to say something which he deemed of importance.

‘Where is Ellen, sir?’

‘In the house with Mrs. Eliza. She is happy and comfortable, my lad; and when you and me have had our bit of talk, we will go in to her. She knows that we’re together, and that we’ve got

something to speak about. As you turned the street, she put her pretty head out of window there—you didn't know the house or you'd have seen her do it, like a true sailor as you are—and when she saw us together, she put her pretty head in again, satisfied. And you left everybody at home all right, eh? Grieving naturally to be sure, but otherways all right?

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Let us walk as we talk,’ said the Old Sailor, hooking his arm in Joshua's, and walking in the direction of the river. ‘Or we shall talk better in a boat, perhaps; Mrs. Eliza's husband shall paddle us about the while.’

‘But I should like to see Ellen just for one minute first.’

‘To begin your kissing, eh, my lad?’ said the Old Sailor, with a roguish laugh. ‘No, no; you'll have plenty of time for that. I'm in command now, and I'll have no mutineering, or I'll put you in irons. You'll not like them as well as Ellen's pretty arms.’ Notwithstanding the light nature of the Old Sailor's words, Joshua detected a serious mood beneath them, and with a good grace he walked to the landing-place and stepped into the boat which Mrs. Eliza's husband held ready.

‘So you were a long time with Dan, my lad,’ remarked the Old Sailor, when they were launched.

‘What did you talk about mostly?’

‘The old things, sir—ourselves mostly!’

‘You have no secrets from Dan, my lad?’

‘No, sir, none.’

‘And he has none from you?’

‘None, sir.’

‘And yet I’ll be bound,’ said the Old Sailor, looking steadily at Joshua, and compelling Joshua to return his gaze, ‘that there was something which you might have spoken of had you not been restrained by a feeling, say, of kindness to Dan. What, now?’

‘There *was* something, sir,’ replied Joshua, wondering what this conversation, so singularly commenced, would lead to.

‘Ah!’ ejaculated the Old Sailor, rubbing his knees in a satisfied manner; ‘let us hear what that something was.’

‘You speak so earnestly, sir,’ said Joshua, inwardly questioning himself, ‘that I must be careful not to conceal anything from you—not that I have any reason nor that I wish to do so, but something might escape me. I must first say, though, that you must not expect me to break

any confidence—that supposing Dan had a secret, and had imparted it to me, I should not be justified in telling that secret to any one else.’

‘Fair and honest, my lad; what I expected from you.’

‘Well, then, I have been sorry to find that Mr. Kindred——’

‘Minnie’s father—yes,’ interrupted the Old Sailor, with a sharp look at Joshua.

‘——Has been changed to all of us lately, and especially to me; and I have been sorry to think that it is because of something which I have done that he is so changed.’

‘You know of nothing, Josh?’

‘Nothing—absolutely nothing; and that’s what grieves me. If I did know, I should be able to justify myself. Why, sir, this morning he refused to see me when I went to wish him good-bye, and refused to let me see Minnie. I did not speak of this thing to Dan because of my love for him.’

‘And because,’ said the Old Sailor, ‘supposing that Dan had a secret and had imparted it to you, you thought that Dan would be easier in his mind—in consequence of his secret—if he did not know of Mr. Kindred’s strange refusal to see you.’

‘Just so, sir.’

‘ Could I guess this secret of Dan’s ? ’ questioned the Old Sailor. ‘ Could an old tar like me, who wouldn’t be supposed to know much of boys and girls and their whims and whams, venture to guess that this secret of our dear friend Dan’s was all about a woman ? ’

Joshua did not reply.

‘ And such a woman ! ’ continued the Old Sailor. ‘ With eyes as bright as the stars, and with hair like a mermaid’s. As cunning as a mermaid too ; not wickedly cunning—no, no ; but ’tis in her to be so ; and she needs weaning from it, like a babe. ’

Very gentle was the Old Sailor’s voice ; and greatly did Joshua wonder, not at its gentleness, for that was natural to the old man, but at the wisdom of the words that came from his lips. All his roughness was gone ; all his pleasantry was gone ; all his simplicity was laid aside for the time ; and the Old Sailor spoke as if all his life he had been studying woman’s nature until he was master of its complexities. But such deep wisdom often comes from very simplicity.

‘ Lord love you, my lad ! ’ he said, ‘ how blind you have been ! Here has been a woman’s heart laid bare to you, and you have not suspected it. ’

Joshua trembled with apprehension.

‘For heaven’s sake, sir,’ he implored, ‘speak more plainly!’

‘I intend to do so, Joshua; for this is the solemnest time of your life. I have considered the matter deeply, and I can see but one right thing to do; but I am running ahead too fast. Steady there, steady. As I said a time ago, here has been a woman’s heart laid bare to you, and you have not suspected it. What woman, now? But ’tis not right to ask, mayhap.’

‘Ask me anything, sir; I will answer truly.’

‘What woman do you love?’

‘Ellen.’

‘Ellen? And Ellen only?’

‘And Ellen only. None other; nor ever shall, if it is given to man to know his heart.’

‘Good! Answered like yourself; answered like the lad I used to see looking out on the river that runs to the sea; like the lad my old heart warmed to because there was honesty in his face; like the lad who has grown to be a man, and who sits afore me now with truth in his eyes.’

‘Thank you for that, sir.’

‘What woman does this lad, now grown to be a man, love? Ellen—the pretty Ellen, the truest hearted, gentlest hearted, kindest hearted, dearest

lass on all the high seas. What woman does Joshua's friend Dan love? That's a question I ask myself. 'Tis easily answered. Minnie—Minnie with the mermaid's hair, and with eyes bright as the stars. Does Minnie love Dan? Yes; but not as Dan wants her to love him. Why? Because there is some one in the way.'

'Who, sir?' Joshua was constrained to ask, but dreading the answer.

'She loves Dan's friend Joshua better than she loves Dan. Let that friend, who sits afore me now, search his heart and his mind, and let him say what he thinks. He knows her nature; has been her friend since she was a girl; and, cunning as a woman may be, no woman can be cunning enough to hide her love always from the man she loves, though she may hide it from all the rest of the world. It happens sometimes in a man's life that he may be unconscious of a thing for years perhaps, it being present to him all the time, until, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, a sudden light is thrown upon it, and he sees in a flash what he has been blind to all his life before.'

'You are right, sir,' said Joshua sadly. 'It has happened to me now. I have been blind.'

As he sat, sadly looking at the evening shadows reflected in the river, every circumstance connected with his intimacy with Minnie came to his mind with an interpretation different from that it had borne before. Her pretty fancy of the shell, which he had thought of often as a childish conceit, bore a different meaning now. Tender looks and simple acts, which had pleased him at the time, gathered strength, and became more than tokens of mere friendship. Child as she was when he first went to sea, he recognised now that she had more than the strength of a child; that even then, indeed, she was almost a woman. When he came back, a man, she had saved his life; and when he thanked her for it—surely he could do no less!—she told him that she did not want thanks, for the having saved his life would ever be her sweetest remembrance. ‘Little Minnie, little Minnie,’ he had said, kissing her, ‘thank you for your devotion.’ He remembered that she trembled, and that something like a sob escaped her when he had kissed her. Had he done wrong? Was he to blame? All he had done had been innocently done, as from a brother to a sister. And her feelings were known to others when they had been hidden from him. Minnie’s secret was known to her father

and to Susan. That was the reason why Basil Kindred had questioned him so strangely, and had told him the story of his life. Words uttered by Basil, which had borne no direct signification when they were spoken, came to him now with startling vividness. 'Young men are often thoughtless in their actions,' Basil had said; 'they do not know the depth and earnestness of some womanly natures.' The revelation that had come to him served also to account for Susan's singular conduct that very morning.

'So,' he thought; 'they believe I have been playing with Minnie's feelings; and both of them have condemned me. And I at the same time engaged to Ellen! It is too dreadful to think of. What can I do? O, what can I do?'

The unspoken words rended him to the soul; he was enveloped in a despairing darkness. But a greater terror than all fell upon him when he thought of Dan. In such a momentous crisis as that through which Joshua's mind was passing, nothing of the past is unremembered. Words which otherwise are borne in mind only by their sense come back as if they were just being uttered. When Dan had imparted to Joshua the secret of his love for Minnie, he had said, 'A great hope,

shadowed by a great fear, has entered my soul ; a hope which, fulfilled, would make earth heaven for me. Is it too precious a thing to pray for ? It seems so to me. I tremble as I think of it. But if it is not to be, I hope I shall soon die.' And Joshua heard again that cry from Dan's soul, almost word for word. The sacred nature of the love existing between Dan and Joshua needs to be understood to realise the terrible fear that smote Joshua at the present time. If Dan should ever come to believe him false, he would not wish to live ; for the salt would have gone out of his life for ever.

For full a quarter of an hour Joshua was wrapt in painful thought ; and the Old Sailor had not disturbed him. But now, as he raised his tearful eyes to the Old Sailor's face, the Old Sailor laid his hand gently upon Joshua's knee, and said :

' Well, Joshua, and how do you make it out ?'

' As bad as it well can be, sir. This is the hardest stroke I have ever had. I do not think that even you can understand how hard it is for me.'

' Because of Dan ?'

' Because of Dan, sir. I have no need to hide Dan's secret from you now—you know it ; but if Dan should be disappointed in his love for Minnie,

I don't know what effect it would have upon him. All this is very terrible. I don't need to assure you, sir, that I have been entirely blameless, and that I have never treated Minnie in any way but that of an honoured sister.'

'You do not, my lad,' said the Old Sailor, with an evident brightening up in his manner; 'I am satisfied of that. But what do we do when a storm comes? Do we run and bury our heads in our hammocks, or do we stand up like men to meet it and battle with it?—as we are going to meet this storm, which has come upon us unaware, and from no fault of our'n. Like men, Josh; we're going to meet it like men. I am looking it straight in the face. No wonder it made you stagger when it come upon you sudden. It set my old head a-thinking when I found it out—though it only come upon me by degrees, and after a deal of watching. Just you think a bit now, Josh, and tell me if you don't see any way of getting the ship off the rocks.'

'I can see no way, sir,' said Joshua after a little anxious pondering; 'all is dark around me.'

The Old Sailor laughed a quiet little laugh.

'Lord, Lord! how blind these youngsters are! Here's a sailor that's lost his reckoning, and run-

ning the danger of seeing his ship break-up before his eyes ; and all the while there's a smooth-water bay close alongside him, and a friendly craft waiting to give him a hand.'

'Where is that bay, sir?'

'Steady, my lad, steady. Let's see what we've got to do. Firstly, our duty to everybody, right round. Next, to make two persons, who ought to know better, ashamed of themselves for misjudging of us. Next, to make everything so snug that our friend Dan sha'n't suffer from any fault of our'n. Next, to teach a gentle lesson to a mermaid of a girl who's got a notion in her head that's no business to be there, but who otherways is as good as gold. It's a riddle, my lad, and I've got the key to it in my pocket.'

'May I see it, sir?'

'You may, and shall, Josh,' said the Old Sailor with a sly chuckle. 'It was to give you the key that I brought you out here to talk.'

And the Old Sailor took from his breast his blue-cotton pocket-handkerchief, upon which was imprinted the twelve-hundred ton ship, with all its sails set to a favourable breeze. There was a knot in the handkerchief, which the Old Sailor undid with his teeth, keeping his eyes fixed upon

Joshua's face all the while. The knot being untied, the Old Sailor took from the handkerchief a very small parcel in silver paper, and handed it to Joshua in perfect silence.

Joshua opened the silver paper, and found in it a Wedding-Ring.

He looked at the tiny symbol with a beating heart, and a glimmering of the Old Sailor's meaning dawned upon his mind.

'That's the key, my lad,' said the Old Sailor with a triumphant expression on his honest weatherbeaten face; 'that's the key to it all. You put that ring upon pretty Ellen's finger to-morrow morning early, and what happens? Why, you spend your honeymoon here in Gravesend with your little wife; and when the Merry Andrew sets sail,—which won't be to-morrow, Josh; I've found that out,—Ellen goes back to Stepney with that pretty bit of gold on her finger. Says she, "I'm married—married to Joshua." "Married!" says they, all but one of 'em; "married!" And surprised they are, all but one of 'em. "Who made you do it?" says they, all but one of 'em. "Mr. Meddler," says she; "Mr. Meddler made me do it. He's a hard-hearted old shark, and he *made* me do it. But I'm not

sorry for it," says she; "I'm glad of it. And I'd do it over again to-morrow; for I've got a true-hearted man for a husband, and all I've got to do is to pray that he may come back safe to me and to all of us." With that they all fall a-kissing one another, which is but right under the circumstances. What happens then? Says Susan, "I was mistaken; Joshua is as he always was." Says Mr. Kindred, "Minnie is safe. God bless Joshua for doing what he has done." Says Minnie to herself, "It's no use my loving a married man. I've been a foolish girl, and what I've got to do is to love Joshua like a brother, as he has always loved me—like brother and sister; that's all we can ever be to one another." Then she turns to Dan, and loves that tender-hearted friend,—who ought to have been a man six foot high, with his limbs as sound as our'n,—and loves him as he ought to be loved. And I shouldn't wonder, my lad, that when you come home from this trip Dan will say to you, "Here is my wife, Jo, my own dear Minnie; and we're as happy as the day is long." The consequence of all of which is, that everything turns out as it ought to turn out, and as we all want it to turn out.'

The Old Sailor drew a long breath after this peroration, and dabbed his face in a manner expressive of a high state of exultation and excitement. Joshua was no less moved. He toyed with the wedding-ring as gently and affectionately as if it were already on Ellen's finger. Truly, to him it was more than a piece of plain gold; it was a symbol of love. If it had been a precious life, he could not have handled it more tenderly. Tears came into his eyes as he looked at it, and his heart beat more strongly with love for Ellen as he pressed the ring to his lips. At which action the Old Sailor gave his knee a great slap; and falling back, in the excitement of his triumph, upon Mrs. Eliza's husband, nearly upset a boat for the first and only time in his life.

'And that is the reason, sir,' said Joshua, 'that you wished me to spend my last day at Gravesend with Ellen?'

'That is the reason, my lad, and no other.'

'But how did you find all this out?'

'The fact of it is, my lad,' replied the most unsuspicious and guileless old tar that ever crossed salt water, 'I put this and that together. I put this and that together,' he repeated with an air of amazing cunning. 'It came first in a simple

way. When you were ill, I went one day to see Minnie's father; and when I went into his room, I found that he was out. Minnie was there, though; but she didn't see me. She was sitting on the ground by her father's bed, with a shell at her ear, and was singing some words softly to herself; and I heard her repeat your name, Joshua, over and over again. It might have been a babe singing, her voice was so low and sweet. But I didn't like to hear it, for all that; and from that time, my lad, I began to watch, and to put this and that together. Lord love you! if you hadn't been so wrapped up with Ellen, you would have found it out yourself soon enough. You see, if Minnie had been a little girl, that shell and her singing wouldn't have mattered; but being a woman, it did.'

'And Ellen, sir. Have you told her what you have told me?'

'Just as much as wouldn't wound her sensitive heart, the dear lass. Not a word about Minnie. I've put it more as if it was your doing and my wish, being an unreasonable old shark, you know, and because I had a right to have my own unreasonable way. I told her I'd set my heart on it, and so had you.'

‘And her answer?’

‘That pretty little lass says, “If Joshua, that I love dearer than all the world”—them’s her very words, dearer than all the world—“wishes me to marry him down here at Gravesend, it will be my pride and my joy to do as he wishes, now and always.” Something else she says too. But before I tell you what that something else was, let me know what you think about it, Josh.’

‘What can I think, sir, after what you have told me, but that I believe it is the best and only way to set all matters straight? It is a task both of love and duty—love to Ellen, duty to Dan and Minnie. Yet I have one regret. I have often pictured in my mind what a proud day our wedding-day would be to mother,’—his voice faltered here, —‘and how her dear face would have brightened when our hands were joined!’

‘That’s the very something else that Ellen says to me, Josh,’ said the Old Sailor, beaming with satisfaction. ‘Says she, “I should like to have Josh’s mother at the wedding.” Says I, “My dear, Josh’s mother *will* be at the wedding.”’

‘No!’ exclaimed Joshua with a sudden start of surprise.

‘Yes,’ cried the Old Sailor, dabbing his face

gleefully. ‘ Says I, “ My dear, Josh’s mother *will* be at the wedding. She will come down to Gravesend to-morrow morning early, and will go back quietly in the afternoon.” And when Ellen tells ’em at home all about it, mother will be the only one among ’em who won’t be surprised.’

‘ Enough said, sir,’ said Joshua, his heart filled with wondering happiness. ‘ I don’t know what I have done to deserve such friends as I’ve got. Let us get back to Ellen.’

With that, Mrs. Eliza’s husband, who had behaved more like a machine than a man during the long interview, pulled briskly to shore.

It was dusk when they walked along the street where Mrs. Eliza lived ; but Joshua saw Ellen standing at the door waiting for them. He hastened to her eagerly, and with his arm round her waist, drew her away from the little light that was left. She was trembling ; but his strong arm supported her.

‘ So you are to be my little wife to-morrow ?’ he said in a voice of exceeding tenderness.

She clung closer to him, and hiding her face, although it was dark, answered him in the softest of soft whispers, ‘ Yes, if you are satisfied that it shall be so.’

‘It will be for the best, darling,’ he whispered, embracing her.

How proud he was of her! and what a memorable night they passed with the Old Sailor! The best room in the house had been brightened up for them to have tea in; and after tea, Joshua and Ellen strolled by the water-side for an hour, which seemed about five minutes long, talking as lovers have talked since the Creation. Meanwhile, the Old Sailor stood at the door, smoking his pipe with infinite satisfaction at the thought of having set all matters straight. While he thus stood, a man approached with the evident intention of making an inquiry of him; but catching sight of the Old Sailor’s face, the man uttered a hasty exclamation and abruptly crossed the road, making a pretence of being intoxicated. It was but a pretence, but it deceived the Old Sailor, who set it down in his mind that the man was a sailor on the spree. ‘Going to join the Merry Andrew to-morrow, perhaps,’ he thought; ‘and fuddling himself, as most of ’em do the first and last nights ashore. A rare old swiller is Jack! Never knows when he has had enough. Must always take another drop.’

The man’s thoughts were of a different kind. When he had turned the corner of the street, he

walked more leisurely, and drew such a breath as one draws when he has escaped a danger. His first muttered words were, 'He didn't see me;' his next, 'What the devil brings him here?' That his mind was disturbed by the sight of the Old Sailor was evident from his manner; and it was evident also, by the wary looks he cast about him, that he was bent already on no idle mission and needed nothing fresh to occupy him. 'A good job it was dark,' he muttered, directing his steps to the water-side; 'if he had seen me, he would have been sure to tell Marvel, and it might have given rise to suspicion. Where is that dog of a Lascar, and what the devil does he mean by keeping me waiting?' The words were scarcely uttered when his face grew deadly white, and an ugly twitching came about the corners of his lips, at what he saw before him. It was merely a man and woman—evidently lovers—who were walking slowly along, in earnest conversation. He was about to follow them, when his arm was touched by a new-comer, in a sailor's dress.

'Here I am, master,' said the new-comer.

'See there, you dog!' exclaimed Solomon Fewster, pointing to the lovers. 'See there! What brings her here?'

The Lascar looked after them, shading his eyes with his hand, and shrugged his shoulders. 'Joshua Marvel and Ellen Taylor!' he said, with a careless laugh. 'Doing a little sweethearting on the sly. If you had the chance, you'd do the same yourself. See, they're turning back this way; let us get out of sight.'

They stood aside, and as the lovers passed, heedful of nothing, conscious of nothing, but their own great happiness, their faces met, and a kiss passed between them. In his torment of jealousy, Solomon Fewster grasped the Lascar's shoulder so tightly as to make the man wince. The dog shook himself free from his master, and said, 'Well, he'll be away soon, and you'll have the pretty Ellen all to yourself. Come, now; I don't want to stop here all night. Let us say what we've got to say, and be done with it.'

Solomon Fewster walked away a few steps to recover his composure, and when he had mastered his agitation, returned to the Lascar.

'I shipped this morning, through an agent,' said the Lascar; 'here are my papers.'

'It is too dark for me to see them; I must take your word that you have done what you say.'

'You have taken my word before, master, and

you have found me faithful. You keep your part of the bargain; I shall keep mine. It is my interest to do so.'

'Yes, your interest,' said Solomon Fewster, with somewhat of a bitter emphasis. 'You have cost me enough, you dog.'

Notwithstanding that their positions of master and dog might have been appropriately reversed, the old fiction was kept up between them, with insolent arrogance on one side, and with mock humility on the other. Neither of them deceived the other.

'I might have cost you more, master,' replied the Lascar; 'but go on.'

'Let us see, then, if we are agreed upon the position of matters, and if we understand one another. When a certain thing happened last Christmas, which nearly cost a whelp his life, you thought it necessary for your safety——'

'We thought it necessary for our safety,' corrected the Lascar.

'——To take yourself off somewhere, so as not to be seen, and therefore not suspected. Out of sight out of mind. In accordance with that understanding you went to a certain watering-place, and lived at my expense until you got into a drunken

quarrel with your drunken mates, in which one of them received a cut across the face. The same night—being within a week of the present time—you thought it advisable to leave that district, and you accordingly did so, coming down here to Gravesend, and apprising me that you were in danger of arrest and in want of money.'

'You talk like a book,' said the admiring Lascar, with a laugh.

'I came down to see you, and to advise you ——'

'Taking such an interest in me, master,' interrupted the Lascar, with another and a louder laugh.

'—— And I told you that as in England a man who is too free with his knife is likely to be deprived of his liberty for a longer time than he would probably consider pleasant, the best thing you could do—the police being on the look-out for you—would be to join a ship bound for a distant port, and so get clear of danger. Is that fairly stated?'

'Pretty fairly for you, master. It is for me to say, that so long as I am out of danger your safety is secured. But that's a matter, of course, that you don't think much of.'

‘It happening, as it does not often happen with such dogs as you,’ continued Solomon Fewster, taking no other notice of the Lascar’s taunt than was indicated by a contemptuous emphasis on the word ‘dogs,’ ‘that you were for once open to reason, you agreed with me that it would be best for you to get out of the country. As luck would have it, Joshua Marvel’s ship, the Merry Andrew, was shortly to start for New South Wales, and as part of the crew was to be engaged at Gravesend, where you were skulking about, you set your mind very strangely upon going in the same ship with the whelp, and according to your own statement, have accomplished your desire to-day.’

‘I didn’t find it a very difficult thing, master. Sailors are none so plentiful. Go on.’

‘When I found that you were determined to go in Joshua Marvel’s ship, I, bearing in mind that you have been as faithful as it is in the nature of such a dog as you to be, told you that the night before the ship sails, I would come down and give you a few necessaries which you said you required.’

‘Such as twenty-five pounds in gold,’ said the Lascar.

‘Such as twenty-five pounds in gold,’ repeated Solomon Fewster, taking some packets from his pocket.

‘Such as a six-bladed knife.’

‘Such as a six-bladed knife.’

‘Such as another knife with one blade.’

‘Such as another knife with one blade.’

‘Such as a silver watch and a silver chain.’

‘Such as a silver watch and a silver chain.’

‘Bah!’ exclaimed the Lascar, in a voice of intense scorn, as he received the articles, one after another. ‘Look at the sky, master.’

It was intensely dark; the clouds were black, there was no moon, and not a star was discernible. Solomon Fewster looked up, and said, ‘Well?’

‘What can you see, master?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Look at me’—he had walked away a few paces. ‘Can you see me?’

‘I can see your form.’

‘Not my face, nor my eyes?’

‘No, you dog!’ answered Solomon Fewster hotly, for the Lascar’s voice was contemptuously insolent.

‘Bah! you are worse than I am. Too free with my knife, am I? I wonder whether you

would be too free with your knife—in the dark? In the light I know you wouldn't be. You wouldn't have the pluck to use it. Look you, master: the first part of what you said was pretty well as things happened; but the last part—— Well, you and me know all about that. And yet, although we're in the dark, and can't see each other's face, nor each other's eyes, you haven't pluck enough to tell the truth; you haven't pluck enough to say even to me, here in the dark, with no one by, that when I found that the Merry Andrew was going to sea, I said to you, "What a fine thing it would be for me to go in the same ship as Joshua Marvel, and to take advantage of anything that might happen to do him a good turn!" and that then you mentioned—quite accidentally, of course—that if anything should happen to him through me, you would give me fifty pounds if the Merry Andrew came home without Joshua Marvel. You haven't pluck enough to say that then I said, Done! and done it was; but that I—knowing you, master—made a point of having something in earnest of the bargain—such as twenty-five pounds in gold; such as a six-bladed knife; such as another knife with one blade; such as a silver watch and chain. Bah!

If it wasn't that I was such a cursed fool when my blood is up, that I don't know what I do, and that, because of that, it is safer for me to leave the country than to remain in it, I would stop and feed upon you—I would, by God!—and worry the heart out of such a coward.'

'You've been drinking,' said Solomon Fewster, with difficulty suppressing his anger.

'What if I have? I know what I am saying well enough. I have had too much of your airs of superiority, and of your lies and your acting. Why, do you think that I would ever have done your dirty work, if it hadn't served my purpose? Do you think that if I hadn't sworn an oath, and marked it with my blood, to be revenged upon that damned upstart, Joshua Marvel, for what he did to me, I would go in his ship? Look you! I will do my share of the work, never fear, master; but I would have done it for next to nothing, if you were a man instead of a sneak!'

'You dog!' cried Solomon Fewster, in an uncontrollable burst of passion. 'You have my money, my knives, and my watch upon you at this moment. I have half a mind to give you into custody for robbing me.'

An exclamation of anger escaped the Lascar,

and Solomon Fewster cursed himself inwardly for his injudiciousness the moment the words had passed his lips. A long silence followed, a silence lengthened by Solomon Fewster's fears; for he knew that he was in the Lascar's power, and could not consider himself safe while his dog was in the country.

'I didn't mean that,' he said, with an awkward effort at conciliation; 'but you were wrong to provoke me.'

The Lascar did not reply, and Solomon Fewster's alarm increased with every moment.

'Why don't you speak?' he asked.

'I've been thinking, master,' then said the Lascar with a quiet laugh—'I've been thinking that a man isn't safe with such a sneak as you, and I've made up my mind.'

'To what?'

'To this; and if you don't do it, I'll go straight to Joshua Marvel and his pretty Ellen, and open their eyes to what you are.'

'And ruin yourself,' said Solomon Fewster, trembling in every limb like the coward he was.

'And ruin myself,' said the Lascar composedly, 'and you along with me.'

'You do not know what you are saying.'

‘You shall see,’ said the Lascar, moving slowly away.

‘Stop ! What is it you want me to do ?’

‘If the Merry Andrew returns without Joshua Marvel, and I, having done my work, come to you for my wages, it isn’t unlikely that you’ll hatch some charge against me which I sha’n’t be able to face, for you are rich and I am poor. I will prevent this. You shall come with me now to my lodging-house, and you shall scratch upon the inside of my watch, “From Solomon Fewster to his Lascar friend,” and you shall give me a paper saying as how you made me a present of the knives and the money because I have earnt them. This is what I have made up my mind to, and what I intend to have done, as sure as there is a sky above us. What’s more, I’m not going to have any palaver about it. If you don’t follow me to my lodgings, where I am going this very minute, I’ll peach upon you, by God !’

Without another word, he walked towards the town ; and Solomon Fewster, in a tumult of fear and vain passion, followed him to his lodgings, and unwillingly gave him his bond. That being done, the Lascar repeated that he might be depended upon for fulfilling his task ; and Solomon

Fewster took his leave with the consciousness that the basest of dogs considered himself superior to the master who used him.

Early the following morning Mrs. Marvel came down to Gravesend, and all preparations having been made by the Old Sailor, Joshua and Ellen were married. It was the quietest and happiest of weddings. There were but two guests—Mrs. Eliza, in a blaze of red ribbons, and Mrs. Eliza's husband, whose futile efforts to speak in whispers were the only evidences to Joshua and Ellen that the events of the morning were real. Everything but that irrepressible voice was so hushed and subdued, that it seemed to belong more to a dream than anything else. But it was a happy dream, marred by no cloud, made bright by perfect love. There was no happier person in the party than Mrs. Marvel.

‘Now you are truly my daughter,’ she whispered to Ellen, ‘and really belong to me.’

‘I can't believe that I am awake, mother,’ said Joshua to Mrs. Marvel, as they two stood a little apart from the others; ‘yesterday I had no thought of this. I wonder if Dan is thinking of me! When will you tell him?’

‘None of them will know, dear, until Ellen comes back, and that won’t be until your ship is gone. Mr. Meddler says it will not sail for two days, so your honeymoon will be longer than you expected.’

‘And father! how surprised he will be!’

‘He will approve, my dear, when I tell him all.’

When she told him all! That means, thought Joshua, when she tells him about Minnie. But he said nothing aloud in answer. Minnie was in both his and his mother’s thoughts, but neither of them mentioned her name.

‘Look at her, Josh,’ said Mrs. Marvel, turning with affectionate pride to where Ellen stood, hanging tearfully upon the Old Sailor’s arm; ‘no man ever had a greater treasure.’

Joshua, gazing at the modest figure of his dear little woman, thought of the comparison he had once drawn between Ellen and Minnie. ‘Minnie is like the sea; Ellen like a peaceful lake.’ Everything about her — her dress, her trustful face, the calm light in her eyes — was suggestive of peaceful love, a haven of refuge from the storms of life. She turned to him, and he hurried to her side, and took her arm on his.

‘Darling,’ he whispered, ‘it seems too wonderful to be real. I am afraid that I shall wake up presently, and find that it is all a dream.’

Thank God, that while this world of ours is pulsing with mean ambitions and unworthy strivings, with heartless pleasures and vicious desires, flowers of circumstance such as this bloom sometimes in the lives of the poorest among us!

Dinner was taken in Mrs. Eliza’s private parlour, which abounded in family relics of great price, among which were especially conspicuous two brown-stone mandarins, who wagged their heads upon the mantelshelf; two large pieces of white coral under glass-shades; some stuffed parrots similarly protected from the ravages of time; and an impossible castle made with small shells. It was April weather with all the company, and smiles and tears alternately chased one another. Mrs. Eliza’s husband proposed the toast of ‘The new-married couple,’ but, attempting to make a speech, could only get out the words, ‘And may they ever,’ which he repeated four or five times, without being able to explain himself. However, the toast was drunk not the less cordially, Mrs. Eliza’s husband and the Old Sailor giving three times three in hearty sailor fashion. Then, it

being nearly time for Mrs. Marvel to go back to Stepney, the Old Sailor rose, glass in hand, and said,

‘Mrs. Marvel, lady, if you was my own mother, my dear, which you couldn’t be, seeing that I am old enough to be your father, but if you was my own mother, I couldn’t honour you more. Some women are sent into the world expressly to be mothers; you’re one of ’em, and a noble one you are, and a credit to Britannia. Here’s may Josh and his lass ever be a pride to your heart, lady, as they have ever been, and may Josh be a skipper before he’s thirty! And if a rusty old sailor like me, lady, can ever serve you, my dear, I shall be proud to be commanded by such a commander.’

With that he drained his glass, and, turning it upside down, took Mrs. Marvel’s hand and kissed it, like the gallant knight he was. Amid tears and embraces and blessings, Mrs. Marvel took her departure, escorted by the Old Sailor; and the lovers were left to their quiet honeymoon. The Merry Andrew did not sail until two days afterwards, as the Old Sailor had said. All too swiftly flew by the hours in that brief time; and Joshua and Ellen found it harder to part than they had ever done before.

‘I am pledged to you for ever, darling,’ said Joshua, as they stood together during the last few minutes.

‘And I to you, dear.’

‘I want a curl, Ellen; not to remind me of you, but to have something of you always near me.’

She cut off one of her brown curls, and he kissed her and it, and placed it in the Bible Dan had given him.

‘How I shall count the days, darling! But I shall see you through all my work. It is time for me to go. My undying faithful love for you. My undying faithful love for Dan. And now, put your arms about my neck, and say “God bless you, and bring you safely back!”’

‘God bless you, and bring you safely back, my dear, my heart’s treasure!’

Her strength failed her here, and she was sinking to the ground.

‘Take her, sir,’ said Joshua to the Old Sailor, who was standing a little apart. ‘May Heaven reward you for all your kindness!’ He stooped and kissed her once more, and whispering, ‘I leave my heart behind me,’ hurried with uneven steps to the boat in waiting for him.

CHAPTER IX.

FALSE FRIEND OR TRUE ?

‘I wish Ellen was at home,’ said Dan to himself, as he sat alone in the parlour which served as his training-room ; ‘the house is quite lonely without her.’ Joshua had been gone from Stepney for four days, and, knowing how Dan would miss Ellen, Mrs. Marvel had insisted that he should stop at her house during that time. ‘There will be no one to attend to you, my dear,’ Mrs. Marvel had said to him ; ‘Mr. Kindred is ill, and Minnie and Susan are fully employed waiting upon him.’ Dan acknowledged the superior claims of Mr. Kindred on Minnie’s and Susan’s attention, and consented to stop at Mrs. Marvel’s house until Ellen returned. Now that Joshua was gone, however, he could not help thinking it strange that Minnie had not found time to run in and see him, if only for two or three minutes. He expressed this to Mrs. Marvel, who replied that Mr. Kindred was suffering much, she believed, and did not like

Minnie to be away from him, loving her so dearly. 'But it will all be right, my dear, when Ellen comes back,' she said; 'she will be able to assist the girls in their nursing.' The uneasiness which Dan would have otherwise experienced at not seeing Minnie was allayed by the knowledge that she was doing her duty. Still he was glad when the morning came upon which Ellen was to return; for patient as he was, he was hungering to see Minnie. And now at last he was at home in his own little parlour, waiting almost impatiently for Ellen. He heard a sound in the passage, and he raised his hand in a listening attitude. 'Ellen? No; Susan.' The door opened, and Susan entered. Accustomed as he was to Susan's strange manner and to the alterations in it—morose one day and remorsefully affectionate the next—he had never seen her as he saw her now. Her face was pinched as with some great agony, her hands wandered restlessly about her dress and over one another, her eyes dilated as he remembered them in the old days when she was tormented by the fear that terrible shapes were stealing upon her unaware. Yet, notwithstanding these distressing symptoms of a mind disturbed to its very uttermost, there was something still more painful in her appear-

ance. This was the effort to appear calm and self-possessed, evidenced in the attempts she made to keep her hands still and her eyes from wandering around. But she could not bring colour to her white face, nor composure to her quivering lips. No nerves are more difficult to master than those which directly affect the mouth, and many a hard-grained strong-minded man has betrayed himself by a twitching of his lips, which he has found it impossible to control. Dan had not seen Susan for more than a week, and he was appalled at the change in her. His first thought was of Minnie.

‘What has happened, Susan?’ he cried. ‘Minnie is not ill?’

He betrayed himself in the tone of anguish in which he made the inquiry. Susan twisted her fingers so tightly together that the blood left them, but she felt no pain.

‘Why should Minnie be ill?’ she asked. ‘You have not seen her, then?’

Thank God! Dan thought to himself; it is not anxiety for Minnie that has changed her so.

‘And her father, Susan?’ he said aloud, more softly.

‘Her father!’ exclaimed Susan, approaching Dan so that he could take her hand; it was like

ice. 'Basil! He is stricken almost to death. I don't know what to do; and I am pledged, miserable woman that I am—I am pledged not to speak; not to divulge what I know!'

'Poor Susey!' said Dan soothingly, and in a tone of earnest sympathy, thinking that Susan's last words referred to what the doctor had told him of Basil's heart-disease. 'Poor Mr. Kindred! I am grieved to the soul to hear it.'

She strove to free her hand from his grasp; but he retained it.

'Tell me about Minnie, Susey,' he implored. 'Ah, if you knew how I am yearning to see her—how I am yearning to console her!'

At this appeal, so strong a trembling took possession of her, that her words, to any but the acutest sense, would not have been distinguishable.

'You, Dan!' she said, tightening her grasp upon his hand. 'You yearning to see her! You yearning to console her! Why?'

'Susey, you will help me when I tell you. You will let me see her when I tell you. I love her!'

'My God!'

A deathlike silence followed, and Dan was

almost frightened to break it, but he was constrained by his fears to speak.

‘There is a hidden meaning in your words, Susan,’ he said in hushed tones, ‘that I cannot fathom. Give me some clue, if you have any love for me.’

‘I can give you none,’ she answered hurriedly, ‘until I am released from my pledge. Do not ask me anything else—I don’t think I am conscious of what I am saying. I will go up to Basil—to Mr. Kindred—and beg of him to see you. What is that?’

It was merely a knock at the street-door; but in Susan’s nervous condition the sound was sufficient to cause her to start in alarm from Dan’s side.

‘Only a knock at the door, Susey. You have overtaken yourself, my dear, with nursing.’

Susan hastened to the street-door, and Dan heard a voice ask if Mr. Basil Kindred lived there. ‘Yes,’ answered Susan. ‘Here is a letter for him; is it right?’ ‘Quite right.’ And taking the letter from the messenger, Susan went upstairs to Basil Kindred’s room. She had left the street-door open, and before another minute had passed, sunshine entered the house—sunshine, in the per-

son of Ellen, who, radiant with joy, ran into the house and into the parlour, and clasping Dan round the neck, called him by the dearest of names, and kissed him again and again. What a bright flower she was ! What a lovely flower she was ! What nameless beauty had passed into her face, that caused Dan to thrill with pride that she was his sister, and caused him to wonder at the same time what change it was that had come over her and added to her loveliness ? The sombre aspect of the room was gone ; the chill, the fear, the dread of Susan's meaning was gone ; the terror that had no reason in it, as far as he could see, was gone. For sunshine had entered the house.

‘ O, my dear, dear Dan ! ’ she cried, shedding tears in the fulness of her joy. ‘ O, my darling, darling brother ! I am so happy to be with you again ! ’

She kissed his face a dozen times again, and hid hers on his neck, and kissed that too, until from Dan's heart, infected by her happiness, every particle of fear planted there by Susan's manner had fled. Truly, she was sunshine—the best, the dearest, the warmest.

‘ My dear, dear Ellen ! ’ said Dan, returning her affectionate embrace, ‘ how happy I am that

you are back! I have been thinking how lonely the house is without you. But'—holding her face between his hands and looking at it, bright and blushing and beautiful—'you have grown positively lovely. What have you been doing with yourself these last four days?'

What had she been doing with herself? She laughed softly at the question, then ran and shut the door, and came back and sat on the floor at his feet, tucking up her dress to save it from the dust. She was in such a flutter even then—taking Dan's hand and fondling it—that he waited to speak until she was more composed. Presently she grew quieter, and resting her head on his knees, said,

'Now, Dan, I am quiet. Ask me questions.'

'To commence, then, when did you come back?'

'This very minute.'

'Who brought you back?'

'Mr. Meddler.'

'The dear old friend! Why didn't he come in to see me?'

'For reasons. He said that we had best be left alone, so that we might chat. He is coming to see you to-night.'

‘ When did Joshua’s ship go away ?’

‘ The day before yesterday.’

‘ Why, you little puss, you’ve been playing truant !’

‘ Mr. Meddler persuaded me ; and yesterday Mr. Meddler and Mrs. Eliza and me went for a ride in the country.’

‘ What a grand young lady you’ve got to be ! And Jo !—what about Jo ?’

She nestled to him more caressingly ; and he, passing his hand over her face, drew it away, with tears upon it.

‘ Crying, Nell ?’

‘ For happiness, Dan—for very happiness, my dear ! What about Jo, you ask. I will speak his exact words—almost his last, dear—“ My undying faithful love for Dan.” ’

‘ Dear Jo ! my dear, dearest brother !’

‘ That was not all he said, Dan ; we were speaking of you all the day—you were never out of our thoughts, never out of his, I am sure. He is the dearest friend, the truest friend, the most faithful, the most constant, that happy man or woman ever had !’

‘ He is all that you say, dear Ellen, and I thank heaven for giving him to us.’

‘Any more questions, Dan?’

‘No; I can’t think of any.’

‘Then I must tell you something without being asked,’ said Ellen: ‘I am the happiest woman in the world.’

She rose, and standing at the back of his chair, clasped him round the neck, folding her hands one in the other, so that he should not see her wedding-ring. Then she inclined her lips to his ear, and was about to whisper the precious secret which made her the happiest woman in the world, when an agonised scream rang through the house. With affrighted looks they turned to each other for an explanation.

‘It is Susan,’ said Dan, all his fears returning. ‘I have not had time to tell you, Ellen, but her manner just now frightened me. For heaven’s sake, assist me upstairs!’

With his crutch under one arm, and his other round Ellen’s neck, he went to Basil Kindred’s room, and, pushing open the door, entered. Basil Kindred was sitting motionless in his chair, before a table on which were writing-materials; his head was thrown back as if he were asleep; one hand was on his heart, and the other, from which a letter had fallen, was hanging listlessly down.

And kneeling by his side was Susan, with a look of horror on her white face. But Minnie ! where was Minnie ? No one had gone out of the house ; if she had come downstairs, Dan must have heard her. He sank into a chair and gazed about him vacantly. It was not that the power of thought had left him, but that he was afraid to think. Susan, rocking herself to and fro, her face turned away, had taken no notice of their entrance.

‘ Ask her where Minnie is,’ said Dan to Ellen. He had tried to utter the words two or three times, but his throat was parched ; and now his voice sounded so strange to him, that he wondered if he or some one else had spoken.

‘ Susan !’ said Ellen, placing her hand on Susan’s shoulder. ‘ Susan, where is Minnie ?’

But Susan did not heed her ; and Ellen, raising her eyes from Susan’s face to that of Basil Kindred, retreated appalled to Dan’s side. It looked like the face of one to whom death had come suddenly : perfectly peaceful, but terrible to see. Still she found strength to whisper to Dan, ‘ Be strong, my dear, be strong. Shall I run and fetch mother ?’

‘ Mother !’ echoed Dan, with the same doubt upon him as to whether he or some one else were

speaking. 'Mother! O, Mrs. Marvel you mean—Jo's mother.'

'Yes, dear, Jo's mother and ours. Shall I run and fetch her?'

'No, not yet. What is that paper by his side? Pick it up; give it to me.'

Averting her eyes from Basil's face, Ellen picked up the letter and gave it to Dan. 'It is Minnie's writing,' she whispered.

'Hark!' said Dan.

It was the cockatoo that Joshua had brought home that startled him. It was screeching downstairs, 'Dan, Ellen, Minnie! Bread-and-cheese and kisses! and kisses, and kisses!' ending with the usual running fire of kisses, until it lost its breath. When the bird was quiet, Dan looked at the letter in his hand.

'Minnie's writing,' he said, trying to read it; but the words swam in his fading sight. 'Read it, Ellen; I cannot make it out.'

Ellen took the letter from his trembling hand, and read:

'FATHER,—I have not gone from you because I do not love you, but because it was my fate to do what I have done. I could not resist it. I

have nothing to say in justification of my conduct, except the words I heard you use to Joshua when you were telling him of my mother. I came into the room while you were speaking ; it was dark, and neither you nor Joshua saw me. What you said of my mother then sank into my mind, and I can never forget it. Do you remember ? “ She loved me and sacrificed herself for me. Loving me, she conceived it to be her duty to follow me ; she forsook friends and family for me, and I bless her for it. Her devotion, unworldly as it was, was sanctified by love. There is no earthly sacrifice that love will not sanctify.” As my mother did, so I have done. It will be useless searching for me ; for when you read this, I shall be hundreds of miles away on the sea. If you guess my secret, keep it for the sake of my good name ; and for the sake of my good name do not let any other eyes but yours see this letter. If it were possible for me to have a wish fulfilled, I would pray that I might die before this reaches you. On my knees I ask you to forgive your unhappy

‘ MINNIE.’

No one but Ellen noticed the entrance of Solomon Fewster while the letter was being read ; and

she, with a warning finger to her lips, restrained him by that gesture from coming forward. So he stood silent and attentive within the doorway. As the words came slowly and painfully from Ellen's lips, each of them cut into Dan's heart like a knife. Ellen had seen his sufferings, and would have ceased reading, but that he motioned her to proceed.

'So, then,' said Dan, after a long and painful pause, 'Minnie is gone. What have I to live for now? I would have been content if she had only been near me; if I could have heard her voice or the rustle of her dress to assure me of her beloved presence. Without that, my life is dark indeed. But where has she gone?'

He asked the question of himself; but Susan, starting to her feet, answered him.

'Where has she gone! Where else but to sea in the Merry Andrew, with your false friend Joshua Marvel? And the knowledge of it has killed her father!'

'It is false!' cried Dan in a clear ringing voice. 'It is false, you bad sister!'

'It is true, Daniel Taylor,' said Solomon Fewster in his smooth oily voice. 'I have here a letter from a sailor on board the Merry Andrew,

informing me that Minnie and Joshua are on the same ship.'

At this corroborative testimony, Susan fell upon her knees, and raised her arms.

'Curse that false friend!' she cried.

But Ellen fell at her side, exclaiming, 'O Susan, Susan, restrain your tongue! For all our sakes—for my sake! He is my husband!'

Whereat Solomon Fewster, upon whose face there had hitherto been an ill-concealed expression of triumph, crushed the letter he held in his hand, and muttered a bitter curse.

And Dan, folding Ellen in his arms, said,

'Hush, my sister, hush! Blessings on your wedding-ring! Blessings on your husband and my true friend! We shall live to see him give the lie to slanderous tongues. I have something to live for now—to defend the honour of my brother!'

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAD WITNESS.

WHEN Ellen felt the comforting protection of Dan's arms, and heard the words to which he gave utterance in the nobility of his soul, the despair by which she had been overwhelmed vanished like snow before the sun, and left her an unhappy, but not a hopeless woman.

‘This, then, was your secret,’ said Dan to her, as she lay in his arms; ‘your marriage with Jo. It is the proof of his faithfulness, my dear. For me, I needed none. No heart but mine can judge my friend; no tongue shall malign him unanswered while I am by.’

‘Good, noble brother,’ she sobbed, ‘to comfort me thus in the midst of your own great grief! I do not doubt him; I love him—love him—love him! My faithful darling!’

The reproachful looks she cast at Solomon

Fewster, no less than the passionate tenderness of her words, stung him to the soul. In truth he had received a severe blow. When the Lascar's letter was delivered to him, and he read the amazing news that Minnie was on board the Merry Andrew, he exulted in the triumph that awaited him. 'Ellen is mine,' he thought. 'That fool of a whelp has played straight into my hand!' As such mean souls as Fewster's delight in detecting the meanness of others, he was rejoiced at the thought that Joshua had been playing false with Minnie, although, before reading the Lascar's scrawl, he had no suspicion of it. He walked to Dan's house exultant, and deemed himself fortunate in being in time to witness the tragic scene in Basil Kindred's chamber. But when he heard Ellen's declaration that Joshua was her husband, a groan of despair escaped him, and he became almost desperate in the sudden and unexpected dashing down of all his hopes. This feeling lasted but a very little while. His scheming mind was busy at work calculating the chances for and against him, and rays of light soon illumined the darkness. 'If the Lascar keeps his word, and Joshua does not return,' he thought, 'all may yet be well.' Even when Ellen

flung at him the words, 'I love him—love him—love him!' he said to himself, 'Believing that he will come back to vindicate himself. We shall see.'

Notwithstanding this conflict of thought, his professional instinct led him to the side of the inanimate form of Basil Kindred. He placed his ear and hand to the dead man's heart; and then, with heartless solemnity he lifted the gaunt form in his arms, and laid it on the bed. Susan's eyes asked him, 'Dead?'

'Dead,' he answered aloud. 'It looks like a sudden stroke.'

Dan covered his face; and Ellen shudderingly turned her eyes from Solomon Fewster.

'It is not my fault,' he said, as if Ellen's looks conveyed an accusation. 'Neither this, nor the letter I have received. It would not have been the act of a friend to keep such a thing to himself. What would you have thought of me, if you had discovered that I had received such a letter, and had concealed it?'

'No one accuses you, sir,' said Dan sadly. 'Indeed, how could you be to blame? These things have come of themselves, and from no fault of ours. But,' and his eyes kindled, and

he laid his hand soothingly on Ellen's head, 'we will have no word spoken against Jo. He is dearer to us absent than present; he is dearer to us now, when Susan's voice accuses him, and when you come to add your testimony to hers, than he has ever been before.'

'I have not come to add my testimony to hers,' said Solomon Fewster, with a well-assumed warmth of manner. 'It is no testimony of mine; it is no accusation of mine. This letter surprised and grieved me almost as much as it has you.'

'May I see the letter, sir?'

'Certainly.' He had almost said 'With pleasure,' but checked himself in time.

Dan took the letter, which was written on an uneven and dirty piece of paper, and read aloud:

'MASTER,—Joshua Marvel has run away with a young woman that lives in Daniel Taylor's house—him as trains the birds. They are both of 'em on board the Merry Andrew. I send this by the pilot, and told him that you would pay him for putting it into your hands. My faithful service to you. When I come back, I hope to get what you promised me.

'Aboard the Merry Andrew.'

‘There is no name to it,’ said Dan. ‘Who sent it?’

‘A sailor on the ship,’ replied Solomon Fewster; ‘a man who has done odd jobs for me, and whom I have assisted.’

‘But how does he know me?’

‘Through the birds, and through my telling him of you, I suppose. He has been in the street often, and knows who live in the house. He is a faithful honest fellow, and I daresay thought it his duty to tell me about Miss Kindred, so that I might acquaint her friends.’

“‘When I come back, I hope to get what you promised me,’” said Dan, reading from the letter.

‘I promised him money if he brought home some foreign birds,’ answered Solomon Fewster readily, ‘such as parrots and cockatoos, and other likely birds, for you to train for me.’

Meanwhile Susan had covered the dead man’s face, and sat moaning on the floor. To her Dan addressed himself, calling her by name; but it was not until he had repeated it two or three times that her attention was aroused. She took her hands from before her eyes, and looked at him vacantly. There was no sign of intelligence

in her face as she spoke ; it seemed as if the light of reason had fled, and as if the words she uttered belonged to a lesson she had learned and was forced to repeat.

‘I promised him faithfully and sacredly—yes; they are the very words; he made me say them after him, “Faithfully and sacredly”—that I would never tell unless his tongue was sealed, and the time came when it was necessary to speak. Is the time come?’

‘It is, Susan,’ said Dan, a new fear at his heart; ‘it is come.’

‘Is the time come?’ she repeated, turning to the motionless form on the bed, and waiting for the answer in the awful silence that followed. ‘I was the only one he trusted. Not a soul but me was to come into the room; and they didn’t—no; I kept my promise faithfully and sacredly. He said to me, “If I die, and Joshua Marvel has betrayed my daughter, give this book to Dan, and tell him it contains the words of a dying man.”’ She rose to her feet, and taking a book which was lying on the desk, gave it to Dan. ‘Now you can tell him, when he asks you, that I obeyed him to the last, faithfully and sacredly.’

A listening expression flashed into her face,

and she inclined her body to the door. With feverish haste she ran downstairs and into the street ; but returned presently, muttering, ‘ She is not come ; there’s no sign of her ; ’ and resumed her station by the side of the bed.

It is night, and Dan is sitting alone in his bedroom. An unopened book is before him : it is the book that Susan gave him by Basil Kindred’s desire. He has not read a line in it. Between him and Ellen it has been tacitly agreed that whatever is written in it shall be read by them, and by them alone, at night. Another book is also before him : it is a Bible, and it is open.

Dan is waiting for Ellen. The grief that reigns in the house, and in that of Mrs. Marvel, cannot be written here. It is too deep, too overwhelming for expression. Mrs. Marvel is in the house now. All that she knows is that Basil Kindred is dead, and that Minnie is gone : she has no knowledge of the terrible suspicion that hangs like a deadly cloud over the good name of her beloved son. But the news of the death and the flight : they could not be concealed, although no one is aware how they became known : has gone forth into the neighbourhood ; and little knots of

the neighbours have hung about the house all the evening and night, discussing the strange events. Even now, notwithstanding that it is near midnight, a dozen street-doors are open, each with its assemblage of gossipers, chiefly feminine, prattling, not at all sorrowfully, about the wonderful news. There is much head-shaking and raising of hands; but whatever may be the meaning of this play of heads and hands, it certainly does not express grief. The neighbourhood is rather bare of historical events; and those that have just occurred are godsend. Given to the neighbours round about the merit of all the kindness of heart they deserve, they really enjoy their gossip, and show their enjoyment of it. A stranger walking through the street might have reasonably supposed that the dwellers therein had been making general holiday.

Dan's face is very pale as he sits, with no sign of impatience upon him, expectant of Ellen's coming. The door opens, and Mrs. Marvel enters. She draws down the blind—the moonlight has been streaming in upon his face, giving it a more painful pallor than that which rests on it when the moon is shut out—and sits down by his side in silence for a while. She draws his head upon

her breast, and kisses him ; his arm steals round her neck, and he sheds tears, and kisses her in return ; but few words pass between them.

‘ Susan ? ’ he asks.

‘ She is in bed, my dear,’ she answers.

‘ Has she said anything ? ’ he asks anxiously.

‘ She has not spoken, my dear.’

He gives a soft sigh of relief. She knows that he is waiting for Ellen, and she will not linger. She kisses him again in her motherly way, and bids him good-night ; and soon after Ellen enters the room.

A great change has taken place in Ellen. All the girlishness has gone out of her face, and in its stead is an expression of quiet trustfulness in which there is much sadness, but no doubt. It is as though she is prepared to defend and believe in her husband’s honour, though all the world condemn him. She closes the door gently, and draws a chair next to Dan. Then those two faithful souls, to each of whom the bitterest of trials has come, look into each other’s eyes, and are comforted by what they see. They exchange no words of sympathy ; none are needed from one to the other. They make no effort to conceal their sorrow ; it must be borne, and they must suffer.

But for Joshua's sake, and for Minnie's, they must be brave and hopeful.

Does Ellen acknowledge this, and in her heart of hearts is she disposed to be generous to the unhappy girl who has brought this great misery upon them? Yes — she feels nothing but pity for Minnie. The influences which actuate mental feeling are so delicate and various, that it is difficult even to the most profound of pathognomists to dissect the commonest of motives, and rightly account for it. We all pride ourselves, in a greater or less degree, upon our knowledge of character, and believe that we know full well what prompted So-and-so to do such-and-such a thing. But in truth in nothing do we show more ignorance than in arrogating to ourselves the power of divining character and motive. Strive as we may to be just and calm and reasonable—strive as we may to banish for the time the small feelings of uncharitableness which we are conscious of harbouring, and which necessarily warp our judgment—we must from very necessity argue in a certain measure from our own point of view. Otherwise we should be infallible, and juries would never return a wrong verdict, and judges would never commit an error of judgment. Otherwise rogues

would have their due; and some of them would not, as they do now, live in fine houses, and eat and drink of the best. It is impossible to put yourself in another man's place.

Most women in Ellen's situation would have thought of Minnie with inexorable animosity. Not so Ellen. The knowledge that Dan loves Minnie would alone have been sufficient to disarm harsh or bitter feeling. But that influence is not necessary. She has the firmest faith in Joshua's honesty and virtue, and firmly believes that when he returns home, please God, all will be explained. In the mean time, her duty is clear. Joshua's good name is at stake. In face of all adverse circumstance and sentiment, she must uphold it, and defend it if necessary.

Thus it is that as she and Dan sit looking sadly at each other, Dan is comforted by what he sees, and she is no less so. Their mutual faith in the purity of the absent dear ones is inexpressibly consoling to them. Unconsciously each gives to the other strength to bear the bitterness of the shock. But when their eyes turn to the book which they are to read to-night, they hesitate and tremble. What may not those dumb pages reveal! The place, the time, and all its surrounding cir-

cumstances are solemn and mournful. The presence of Death; the silence that strikes greater terror than brazen tongue of accusation; the gloom of the mean apartment, in the corners of which lurk fears made awful by the black shadow which enwraps them—these things and their influence impress with a deeper sadness those two young hearts. What wonder that they hesitate and tremble as they look upon the book in which the words of their dead friend are recorded? Joshua is on the sea, and each moment adds to the distance that separates him from his friends; Minnie is gone also; Basil, alas, is dead; and all that remains to light the mystery is the dumb witness that lies before them. But hesitation soon yields to indomitable faith.

‘Ellen,’ says Dan, laying his hand upon the book, ‘perhaps the worst of this day’s trials is here. Are you prepared for it?’

‘Yes, Dan,’ answers Ellen, with a steady light in her eyes.

‘Susan’s words were very dreadful,’ continues Dan; ‘but she does not know Jo as we know him. Come, we will read what is here written. And if it accuses your dear husband and my dear friend, our hearts will defend him. His memory will be

dearer to us because he is unjustly accused ; and we will wait hopefully and patiently for his return, please God, and never, never waver.'

And drawing Ellen closer to him, Dan opened the book, and in a subdued voice read what follows.

CHAPTER XI.

BASIL KINDRED'S DIARY.

I MAKE this record for various reasons, the strongest of which is the conviction that I have not long to live. Although my mind is in a state of sad confusion, what I write shall be no phantasy of the brain. I pledge myself to this. And I pledge myself also to throw down my pen when the suspicion comes upon me that, because of my fears and my agony, I am writing what is not strictly the fact. If I do not thus pledge myself, and death comes upon me unaware, this mute witness might be the cause of bringing undeserved unhappiness to persons whose conduct towards me has been wonderfully good and noble.

Let me read what I have written. Yes, it is clear, and it gives me the assurance that, to-day at least, I shall be able to express myself clearly. I pause over every word. I am careful of the construction of every sentence. For I must be

just. I could not rest in my grave if my fear spoke instead of my reason.

What is it that immediately prompts one to commence this record? A letter—signed by no name, delivered by I know not whom. The writing is strange to me; I have never before seen its like. It lies before me now, upon my desk.

It is night. I am alone, and Minnie is at Mrs. Marvel's house. Let me carry back my thoughts to the time when I first made the acquaintance of the good people with whom I have lived for years—for many happy years—during which Minnie has grown from a child to a woman.

I had left her at home, poor child! hungry and unhappy. She had asked me in the morning for food, and I had none to give her, nor any money to buy it for her. The previous night we had eaten our last piece of bread. I went out of our little room, telling her I was going to get food for her. I toiled in the streets all the day, and was not fortunate enough to receive a penny. My sufferings were great, almost too great for human endurance, but I was compelled to bear them for the sake of Minnie. Nothing but the consciousness that, if I went home without food, my child might die from want, supported me. Late in the

afternoon I was in the streets declaiming, when some boys among the crowd which surrounded me threw stones at me. One of the stones wounded me in the forehead, and I think I must have fainted. Two persons came to my assistance—a woman and a boy. The woman was Susan Taylor, the boy was Joshua Marvel. They assisted me home, and the next thing I remember was Susan bathing my wound and making tea for me. The boy Joshua had brought in some food for us. My gratitude was great, for his charity had saved my child. I blessed him that night before he left us.

From that time he was a constant visitor to our wretched lodging, and from that time I never knew want. I grew to love him. He was to be a sailor, and it was a pleasure to me to listen to the enthusiastic outpourings of his mind. He had a friend, Dan, whom I had not then seen; and the loving manner in which he spoke of that friend, seemed to me to be an assurance of the goodness of his own heart. He was the principal subject of conversation between me and my daughter, and she, dear child! grew to love him too. Before he went to sea, the woman Susan Taylor—the sister of Joshua's friend Dan—came to live in the house in which I lodged, and was very kind to

us. Joshua went to sea, and I felt a void in my heart as if I had lost a son. Minnie grieved as much as I did—perhaps more—for she had never had a companion, and Joshua's visits were looked upon as a kind of holiday. We consoled ourselves for our loss by speaking of him often and by looking forward to his return home. Minnie derived much pleasure from a childish conceit in which she indulged. She had a shell, and she used to place it to her ear and listen to the soft singing, to remind her of the sea and of Joshua, she said. I thought it was a pretty fancy; but had I feared then what I fear now, I would have crushed the shell to powder beneath my heel.

Some time after Joshua left, circumstances occurred which caused me to remove to the house of Joshua's friend Dan. I was loth to do so when it was first proposed by Susan; but the argument used by Susan, who was devoted to us, that Minnie would have a companion of a suitable age in her sister Ellen, prevailed upon me. That was the sole cause of my removal to the house in which I am now living. I had reason to be grateful for the change. Minnie, who used to have many unhappy moods, was happy and cheerful in the society of her new friends. And I was no

less so. I found that Joshua's parents were good simple people whom to know was to love. A girl could have had no better companion than Ellen, who is one of the pearls of womanhood. But before them all, I learned to love Dan. I had never met with so pure a mind, with so constant a nature. A cripple almost from his birth, it seemed as if the good God had endued him with the purest thought and the sweetest disposition to compensate for the misfortune he had met with. He might truly say, with our great poet, 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.'

Some happy years passed, during the whole of which Joshua was at sea. At rare intervals letters from him were received, and the perusal of these letters gave us all—for we were like one family—the greatest pleasure. At length he returned. It is not long since—but a few short weeks—that he arrived home. He was expected, but not so soon. His coming was eagerly looked for—he was the hero of the two houses. The night of his return was memorable. It was Christmas-eve, and we were all assembled in Mrs. Marvel's kitchen, celebrating the blessed time with joyful grateful hearts. Minnie persuaded me to read a play. I chose the *Tempest*, that loveliest

creation of the poet's mind. She is not present, but I can see her as she unloosed her hair and stood before me, bright and bewitching as Ariel could have been. 'Do you love me, master?' she asked. I answered in the words of Prospero, 'Dearly, my delicate Ariel.' * * * * I resume my pen, which I had laid aside, thinking that I was being betrayed by my feelings, and that I was indulging in an exaggeration of sentiment. But no. I have read over what I have written, and I am satisfied.

I was in the midst of the lovely story when a knock came at the street-door. Minnie went out of the room to open the door. A silence followed. Presently a scream struck fear to all our hearts. We ran upstairs, and found that Joshua, having returned sooner than he was expected, had been stabbed by a coward's hand when his foot was on the threshold of his home. The house of joy was turned into a house of mourning. I have no need to set down here the events of the next few weeks, that bring me to the present day. Sufficient to say that Joshua lingered for some time between life and death, and to the joy of all of us was declared out of danger three weeks ago. I have been confined to my chamber with my old

complaint nearly the whole of that time. Susan has attended to me chiefly; for seeing Minnie's anxiety to assist Mrs. Marvel in her trouble, I have allowed her to be much away from me. Although Minnie has not spoken of it, I have learned that she, according to the doctor's statement, saved Joshua's life by pressing her lips to the wound in his neck and stopping in some measure the effusion of blood, which might have been fatal to him. It gave me pleasure to hear this; for no service, purposed or accidental, could pay for the kindness we have received from the good people with whom we have lived so happily.

So! I have temperately set down all that has occurred up to the present, or rather up to four days ago, when I received the letter which lies before me now. I will not attempt to describe the effect it had upon me. It seemed to change the current of my blood. If there be truth in it, is there, can there be, truth in man? Before pinning it in the book, I copy it word for word:

'A well-wisher warns Mr. Basil Kindred that Joshua Marvel is playing false with his daughter. The writer has no purpose to serve in writing this, and does not wish to be known. The information he gives is given in kindness. Minnie

Kindred loves Joshua Marvel, who takes every secret opportunity that presents itself to prosecute his bad designs upon a simple girl. It is right that Mr. Basil Kindred should be made acquainted with the real character of the hypocrite, who is fair to a man's face and false behind his back.'

With some girls and with some people the best way to do with such a letter would be to show it to those concerned. But I dare not do this. It would bring unhappiness and mistrust among these confiding good people.

And I fear for Minnie. I fear that the writer, whoever he may be, is right when he says that my darling child loves Joshua. And I, knowing her nature, feel that if unhappily she has contracted a love for Joshua, the discovery of it in this manner would bring misery upon her for life. No; she must not see the letter—must not have a suspicion of it.

All Joshua's previous life contradicts the accusation. It was the simplicity and kindliness of his nature that attracted me to him. If he is fair to a man's face and false behind his back, he is false to his friend Dan; and I, knowing Dan's heart, know that there could be no blacker

treachery than that; for I have at times suspected that Dan loves my Minnie. Yes; I may tell that secret to this mute friend, although I have never otherwise whispered it. On one particular night, when we were all assembled together, reading a letter from Joshua, and when Mr. Praiseworthy Meddler was tracing the course of Joshua's ship upon the map, I detected in Dan's manner something more than a feeling of friendship for Minnie. Since then, other small evidences have forced themselves upon me, and I have not been unprepared for the disclosure of Dan's love. Would it be a good thing for Minnie? Yes; if she returned his love. Although he is a cripple, she could have no better mate: he is all that is noble and good, and he would make her happy, if she could learn to love him.

If she could learn to love him! These words have caused me to think if Minnie could ever *learn* to love—have caused me to ask myself if love is not intuitive to her, as it was to her mother. My anxiety is deepened by the thought. I am afraid to think farther.

Everything depends upon Joshua. If she loves him, and he encourages her, he is false to his

friend, false to honour. My duty is plain. I must watch first, and discover if there be any foundation for the accusation, or if it emanates from spite and vindictiveness.

I close the book and lock it in my desk, for fear other eyes than mine should see what I have written.

* * * * *

Notwithstanding the bodily pain I have suffered, I have so far controlled it as to visit Mrs. Marvel's house during the last three days, and to sit with the young people as if nothing ailed me. I am beset with doubt. I know not what to think. I have watched every look, every movement; and I am afraid that my anxiety has caused me to be uncivil and abrupt. I do not think that any one but Mrs. Marvel has noticed my anxiety or any change in me; but I have observed her sometimes look at me questioningly, as if wondering at my changed manner.

That Minnie has an affection for Joshua is certain; she strives to prevent it being observed, and I think no one suspects her. If there is any secret understanding between her and Joshua, I have not discovered it. He treats her kindly and affectionately, but he is chiefly attentive to Ellen.

But still the letter says that he avails himself of 'every *secret* opportunity' to see her. If that be true, it is not likely that he would betray himself in the presence of his friends. I must act upon the results of my observation. I must endeavour to keep Minnie from visiting Mrs. Marvel's house so frequently; it may prevent her feelings from ripening into love. In a few weeks Joshua will be away, and then all danger will be over for a time. I am, indeed, loth to believe any wrong of him; he seems to have preserved the simplicity of character and the goodness of heart for which I used to admire him.

I am glad I commenced this record; for my thoughts are often very confused, and my memory is impaired.

* * * * *

Although my uneasiness increases with respect to Minnie, I have heard good news: Joshua is engaged to be married to Ellen. Do I need any other proof of Joshua's honesty? It would be monstrous if I did; and yet I cannot regard him with the old feelings of affection, for Minnie is unhappy, and he is the cause. One day I accuse myself of injustice towards him; another day I almost hate him, and curse the circumstance that

made me and Minnie acquainted with him. Would to God that he were gone! Every hour that he stops is an additional agony to me.

Minnie has been sullen and rebellious because I have sometimes prevented her from going to Mrs. Marvel's house. She has not always obeyed me. I must speak more firmly to her; 'I must be cruel only to be kind.'

* * * *

A day of agony. I have not been able to leave my room. Minnie was with me all the morning; but before she came to me, I had received another communication, in the same handwriting as the last. It contained but a few words:

'The friend who warned Mr. Basil Kindred before, warns him again. Joshua Marvel is a smooth-tongued villain. In his character of a hero he is playing false with two simple girls at one time.'

Who can this friend be? I have no friends out of these two houses. But whoever he is, he is right, I fear, as to Minnie, and may be right as to Joshua—the mere writing of the name gives me pain. The receipt of the few words I have just copied opened my wounds, and they bled afresh. I detained Minnie with me all the morning; and when she wanted to quit the room, I invented pre-

texts to induce her to remain. She was not at her ease; I saw that plainly. Once or twice I am afraid that I spoke harshly to her; but she was painfully submissive—almost humble. At length she rose, with the intention of leaving the room. I asked her where she was going. She answered, to see Mrs. Marvel. I grasped her hand, and bade her resume her seat. She asked me why I did not wish her to go to Mrs. Marvel's house; and when I said it was because I thought she troubled the Marvels too much, all the hardness and obstinacy in her nature came into play, and she answered in a voice that might have come from lips of stone, that that was not my reason, and that I was hiding something from her. For the first time I betrayed myself. I asked her if she was not hiding a secret from me; and she returned me an evasive reply. She left the room, and I was about to follow her, when I was seized with a terrible dizziness. My strength deserted me, and I was afraid I was about to die. The attack passed away, and left me as weak as a child.

I pause in my recital of the day's events to make two declarations. The first is, that I am certain, from my sensations this day, that a sudden shock would be fatal to me; I am afraid that my

heart is diseased. The second is, that if I die suddenly, and Joshua has betrayed my child, he is my murderer in the sight of God and man—as much my murderer as if he were to come into the room this moment and plunge a dagger in my heart!

How awful are these words! As I look at them, they seem to rise in judgment against me. ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.’ Am I bearing false witness against Joshua? Am I to be the cause of bringing unhappiness to friends but for whom Minnie and I might have perished from hunger? Still do I cling to the hope that lives in uncertainty. Still do I strive to believe that my fears have grown without reason, and that they are like the monstrous shadows that mock us on the walls and ceiling of a room whose only light is a flickering fire. Above every other consideration, I must be just. If no eye but mine reads these lines, I shall have done no harm in writing them. If it should happily result that Minnie’s love is not deeply rooted—if it should happily result that Joshua has not been tampering with her affections, and that he goes away spotless, as I would fain believe him to be—let me determine to destroy this record. It *must* be done. Deter-

mining to do this — *willing* it with the whole strength of my mind — I shall be able to do it even before I am stricken down, if it be fated that I am to die suddenly. Should it be otherwise — should he prove to be false — this record shall remain as an evidence of his treacherous heart.

When Minnie left me, and I discovered that I was too feeble to follow her, I thought, O, if I had some one that I could trust — some one to help me ! And as I thought, Susan entered the room. In her I confided ; to her I told my fears ; and after pledging her sacredly to secrecy, I showed her the letter I have received. She has promised to watch Joshua, and she will be faithful. Now I shall know whether I have cause for fear ; now I shall know whether Joshua Marvel is false or true.

* * * * *

I do not think I shall ever be able to leave my room. It is more than a week since I wrote in this book. True, I have had nothing to say until now. Minnie has been tender and affectionate to me ; she has been absent at various times during the day ; but when she is with me, she is all that a child should be. I have left her free to come and go, knowing that Susan was watching that she should come to no harm. I sometimes think that

she is fighting with her soul ; for a new-born sadness has settled upon her face. Yesterday I saw her sitting by the window, with her hands clasped in her lap, and a deep-seated sorrow in her eyes. I have seen her mother sit so in the old days long, long ago—in the old days that seem to belong to another life. I had been asleep ; and when I awoke, I saw Minnie wrestling with her sorrow. I called to her twice before she heard me ; and when she came to my side, she had the air of one who has been suddenly aroused from a dream. Darling child, I pray to God to give you strength to bear affliction, if it comes to you ! If any sacrifice that I could make would lessen your pain, how gladly would I make it !

Last night Susan slept with her, and in her sleep heard her murmur Joshua's name. It proves that he is in her thoughts ; but it proves nothing more. I hear a step upon the stairs. Good-night, dumb witness of my grief.

* * * * *

How shall I commence ? All my pulses are throbbing with rage and apprehension. Proof has come. Joshua Marvel is a damned false-hearted villain !

I write with pain and difficulty. My heart is beating so violently, that I am obliged to stop to calm myself, for fear of consequences. Calm myself! Can I do it? I must. I will lay down my pen, and wait until I have subdued the tumult of passion which rages within me.

So! I am calmer. It is well that I stopped, or what the doctor warned me of might have occurred. And I want to live—O, how I want to live!

Susan is sitting in the room with me; for I am afraid of being alone, to-night of all nights. I am glad that I have kept this record; I am glad that, if I die suddenly, the guilt of an infamous recreant will be brought to light by means of this evidence.

About noon to-day—I am writing this at night—Minnie brought a doctor to my bed-side. I had steadily refused to see one before; for I knew what I was suffering from, and I knew that the doctor's art was powerless to cure me. But I was not displeased that Minnie brought him; it was her anxiety and love—for she does love me—that caused her to disobey my wishes. I sent Minnie out of the room, so that I might speak to the doctor in private. He told me no-

thing new ; as well as suffering from rheumatism and low fever, I have heart-disease. He told me what I already knew—that I might die suddenly, without any other forewarnings than those I have already received. He went away after uttering the usual platitudes. Late in the afternoon I fell asleep ; and when it was dark, I heard a step in the room ; asking who was there, Joshua's voice answered me. I spoke to him bitterly out of the bitterness of my heart, and he answered me quietly and feelingly. He said he had noticed with sorrow that I was changed ; that he was not conscious of having done any wrong. He begged that I would be to him as I was before he first went to sea, and when I had blessed him. I could not see his face ; but his voice was tremulous with emotion ; and when he appealed to my sense of justice, I softened to him, for I had no evidence against him but the suspicion which had been created by the warning letters I had received. I had it first in my mind to tell him all ; but my pride and my consideration for Minnie's feelings restrained me. Instead of doing that, I resolved to probe him ; and, that my agitation might not betray me, I refused to have a light. We spoke in the dark. I elicited from him that he was engaged to Ellen,

whom he declared he loved before all the world. Upon that, his hand in mine, I wished him the happiness that faithful love deserves. When, after that, Minnie became the subject of conversation, there was a hesitancy in his manner that aroused my slumbering suspicions. Then I spoke so plainly to him—though telling him nothing about the letters—that he could not have misunderstood me. I told him that my heart was diseased, and that I could not live much longer. I told him that I was tortured by anxiety for Minnie's future; that she needed guidance and control; that she knew only one duty—the duty of love; and that she could scarcely understand that, under certain circumstances, love may be sinful. I told him that she was changed, that she was hiding something from me, and that I was afraid some such love as I had spoken of had come to her. And when I asked him if he knew or suspected to whom that love was given, he was silent, and did not answer me. Was not that silence sufficiently damning? I asked him if he were concealing anything from me, and he equivocated. What should he conceal from me? he asked. At that answer I almost gave up hope; but my child's happiness was at stake, and I per-

severed. I resolved to tell him the story of my life, that he might learn how Minnie's mother sacrificed herself for love; that he might learn what Minnie's nature, being like her mother's, really was; and to what extent she would go where her heart was engaged. It was an appeal to him for mercy. How has he treated that appeal?

I told him the story of my life; I laid bare my heart to him. I lived over again the agony of my wife's death. I told him that Minnie was like her mother, without her mother's teaching; that the impulse of her mind was under the control of the impulse of her heart; that those who knew it must guide her gently, tenderly; and that if any man betrayed her, he would have to answer for it at the Judgment-seat.

Could tongue speak more plainly than mine did? Could any man who was not totally devoid of honour and humanity have listened to my trembling words unheedingly? I appreciate at its proper worth the code of morality by which many heartless men are guided; but I never believed it possible that man could be so base as Joshua has proved himself to be. Here is the proof of his villany. Within a few minutes after my story

was ended—within a few minutes after he left my room, crying in sympathy with me—he was fondling Minnie in the passage below. Susan can prove it. They were in the dark, and Susan came up from the kitchen with a lighted candle, and discovered them. Their hands were in each other's clasp; and when Joshua Marvel saw the light and Susan, he turned away his head, so that she should not see his face. They parted on the moment; and Susan, not appearing to notice them, passed them by, and, faithful woman as she is, came straight to me, and told me what she had seen.

‘Fair to a man's face, and false behind his back’—ay, that he is! But not for him, for whom my indignation can find no fitting name, do I care. For Minnie are all my thoughts. How can I act towards her? How can I warn her? Tell her that he is false! that he is lying to her! that to listen to him is shame! She would smile at my words; and if she dared not scorn, would pity the tongue that uttered the calumny. I must think; I must think. In the mean time, she must not be allowed to go about without being closely watched. Susan will do that for me. It will not be for long. He will be away soon, thank

God; and when he is gone, I can resolve what to do. Perhaps he may never come back. With all my heart I pray——No, I dare not pen the words. The thought of Ellen and Dan, and his gentle mother, stops me. I give them here my heartfelt thanks, for all their noble kindness to me and Minnie. But for him—the treacherous son, the false friend, the perjured lover—I vow never willingly to look upon his face again.

My passion has exhausted me. I turn to the first page of this record, and I see there the pledge that I would throw down my pen when the suspicion came upon me that because of my fear and my agony I am writing what is not strictly the fact. I read over what I have written this night; and I solemnly declare that every word is true, as I hope to meet my wife in heaven!

But a few words more. When I return this book to my desk, I shall tell Susan to place it in Dan's hands, if I die before Minnie is safe. A step upon the stairs! It is my darling child's!——

* * * * *

Another day of misery has passed, and I have received farther damning proof that Joshua Mar-

vel is tampering with Minnie's affections. In my present state of mind, it will be best for me to write down Susan's statement, word for word. I cannot trust myself. I call her to me, and bid her relate, without passion and without prejudice, what she saw to-day. What follows is from her own lips.

SUSAN'S STATEMENT.

‘I noticed this morning that Minnie was more restless than usual. Whenever I looked at her, she looked at me back again; as much as to say, What do you mean by staring at me in that way? I couldn't help thinking that she knew I was watching her, and I felt uncomfortable. But I watched her for all that, as I promised you I would. When she went out of the room, I made believe that I wanted to go out too. Now I think of it, she must have gone out of the room on purpose to try me; because the second time I followed her, she turned upon me in the passage, and looked at me in such a manner that I was frightened. Between eleven and twelve o'clock I was in the kitchen, helping to cook the dinner; and when I came upstairs, Minnie was gone from the house. I ran round to Mrs. Marvel's, and she wasn't there. Scarcely knowing what to do,

I slipped on my bonnet and shawl, and went into the streets to look for her. All at once it came into my mind, that if I should find her anywhere, it would be at the docks, where Joshua's ship was, and where Joshua was working. I ran there as hard as ever I could, and just at the entrance of the docks I caught sight of Minnie. I was regularly out of breath, and my only fear now was that she might see me. So I kept out of the way as much as I could, and followed her quietly. When she got near the ships, she stopped short; and presently Joshua, who was looking over the side of his ship, as if he was expecting some one, came down to where she was standing, and began talking to her. He seemed a little bit uneasy—perhaps because there were so many people about, and because, I thought, he didn't want Minnie to be noticed, for all the workmen and sailors were staring at her. They went up a plank on to Joshua's ship; and Joshua had his arm round her waist. They stood by the side of the ship, looking towards the river, talking together. I never took my eyes off them, and I am certain—though, of course, I couldn't hear them—that they were talking of something very particular. All at once I lost sight of them; they had gone

to a part of the ship where I couldn't see them. I think they must have been out of my sight for nearly a quarter of an hour; and when they returned, Joshua looked to the place where I was standing by the side of some large cases, and came off the ship towards me. I was frightened that he would catch me, and I ran away. When I was safe, I turned, and saw Joshua and Minnie together coming from the ship. Minnie walked out of the docks by herself, and I followed her home, and waited in the street a little before I went into the house after her. But I no sooner got inside the door, than Minnie met me in the passage; she hadn't taken her bonnet off. I didn't seem to notice her; but she came into the kitchen after me. "Where have you been, Susan?" she asked me, so sudden-like that I was almost taken off my guard. "Out for a walk," I said. "Have you been to the docks?" she asked me. "No," I said; but I felt my face turning red as I told the story. I thought she was done with her questions; but she soon commenced again. "Are you going out again?" she asked. I said No, I wasn't. "*I* am," she said; "I am going out for a walk." And she ran upstairs and out of the house. I didn't know what to do; and

I came to you, and you told me not to watch her any more to-day.'

It is evident that Minnie is suspicious of Susan, and I know that Susan is no match for her. Ill as I am, I can see but one thing to do—I must wait and hope. That the innate goodness and purity of Minnie's heart will keep her from harm, is my earnest prayer. I will be, if possible, more tender and loving to her than I have hitherto been. I dare not speak plainly to her; I believe, if I did, that she would go away from us, and we should never see her again. If I were well, it would be different. I should take her from here until Joshua Marvel had sailed.

What can I say of him? It is clear that Minnie went to the docks by appointment, and that he expected her. I have appealed to him vainly. After what passed between us—after the knowledge he has gained that I am aware of his treachery—he has shown himself, in this clandestine meeting with Minnie, to be totally devoid of honour. I leave him to his conscience and to the judgment of his friends. May occasion never come for them to learn how they are deceived in him!

* * * * *

Two days more have passed. In a week Joshua Marvel's ship sails. I believe from that moment I shall begin to grow better. Then I shall make new plans for the future. The future! Alas, my future on earth will soon come to an end! See how I contradict myself. One moment saying that I shall begin to get better when Joshua is gone; the next, that my end must soon come. But 'tis in the nature of such a state of feeling as mine to be hopeful one minute, and despondent the next. The best thing for Minnie would be, that she should be impressed and touched by Dan's love for her—of the existence of which I am sure, having thought much of Dan's manner towards her—and that she should consent to marry him. It is not certain that she loves Joshua; after all, nearly the whole—nay, the whole—of the evidence is circumstantial. It is but natural that she should have an affection for him; the nature of the intimacy, his kindness to her and me, the very circumstances attendant upon his return home, make that a necessity. Indeed, indeed, it would be most unnatural if an affection did not exist between them. The mere writing of these words is comforting to me. I know that they are at variance with much that

I have previously written ; but at one time I am writing out of my despair, at another time out of my hope. I write now out of my hope. Joshua Marvel will soon be gone, and I am assured that no farther meeting has taken place between him and Minnie. Minnie's behaviour to me has been most kind. She is growing more and more like her mother every day. There appears to have arisen in her some consciousness that my claims to her love are more binding upon her than those of any other person. I have passed some very happy hours with her.

She said a strange thing to me this morning. 'Father, do you think I should make a good actress?' The question startled me, for it brought back to me some memories of my past life. Minnie, when a little child, was often in her mother's arms in the theatre where I happened to be playing ; her mother would be waiting for me perhaps, and would not leave our little darling alone in the room. Minnie has no definite remembrance of those times and circumstances, I think ; but shadowy impressions of the scenes she then almost unconsciously witnessed are stamped upon her mind. Upon this theme I questioned her, somewhat curiously, this morning, and found that these

experiences had had their effect upon her, and that she has vague remembrances of beautiful creatures beautifully dressed, walking in gardens in the midst of light. Ah, if she were aware of the reality! If she knew what poor struggling men and women these beautiful creatures were, and what a mockery were the beautiful dresses and the lovely gardens in which they lived their artificial lives! But I did not disenchant her. Life is bitter enough; if a gleam of brightness can be thrown upon it by the indulgence of a harmless fancy, it is good. In the midst of our conversation, Minnie suddenly left the room, and in about half an hour returned completely metamorphosed. She went out of the room a fair lovely girl; she returned a dark tawny woman, looking at least half a dozen years older; but still beautiful, very beautiful. I gazed at her in wonder. By what means had she effected such a marvellous change in herself? She explained, first asking me if I knew her again. Knew her again! Could she by any disguise hide herself from my knowledge? But suppose I had only seen her once in my life, she asked, then did I think I should have known her again? I did not exactly know how to answer that, and although she pressed me to give her an

answer, I could not. I was delighted to see her in the new light in which she presented herself to me; it was almost an assurance that some portion of my fears was groundless. She explained to me that in the box containing her clothes were some remnants of the wherewithals I once used in my profession, such as colours and a few wigs. I had forgotten them, not having had occasion for them for so long a time. And she confessed that she had often amused herself with these things. Indeed, in the middle of her explanation she stooped and hid herself from my sight, and rose in the wig I used to wear when I played Hamlet. She had tucked up her beautiful hair with the skill of an actress, so that it was completely hidden by the wig; and as she stood before me, I saw in her some shadowy resemblance of myself as I was in days gone by. I could not but be delighted with her light humour; it almost entirely dispelled my fears. Then she took off the wig, and washed the colour out of her face, and sat by my bedside quietly. I am used to her variable moods, and therefore, although I was sorry to see that her sportiveness had fled and that a more serious mood took its place, I was not surprised. Never in all her life has she shown me such tenderness as she

exhibited towards me this day. 'I shall always love you, father,' she said to me, more than once. Dear child! Darling treasure of my heart! All good angels guard you!

* * * * *

The cup of happiness is dashed from my lips. Something so strange, so unexpected, has happened, that, simple as it is, I scarcely know how to set it down, or what to augur from it.

Minnie has gone!

Where—for how long—for what purpose—I do not know. She has gone from her home, from me.

Early this morning, while I was waiting to see her dear face, I was thinking of something strange that occurred in the night, wondering whether it formed part of my dreaming fancies or had actually occurred. It was this:

The house was very quiet. It was the most solemn part of the night, when troubled life is most like peaceful death. The healthfulness of dreamless sleep is denied to me, as it is denied to all men whose minds are harassed. For many weeks I have not enjoyed an hour's repose, and so confused are the images that pass through my

mind when I am alone, that I am often in doubt whether the scenes in which I am taking part are real or fanciful. I was in this condition last night at the time of which I am writing. While I was thinking or dreaming of Minnie and her mother, I heard a soft footfall in the room. The impression that some one was in the room was strong upon me, and when I felt a kiss upon my face, and my pillow being smoothed by a gentle hand, I was almost convinced that it was Minnie. The presence remained with me for I know not what length of time ; I do not know when I lost it, or when it departed, but when I called ‘Minnie!’ no voice answered me. When daylight came, I determined to ask Minnie if it was she who had entered my room in the night. I waited impatiently for her appearance, but she did not come. Susan came, and I asked her if Minnie was down yet ; Susan had not seen her. I bade her go and tell Minnie to come to me ; she returned and said that Minnie was not in bed, nor in any part of the house. As Susan told me this, she came to my bedside, and, stooping, picked up a paper which must have fallen from beneath my pillow. There was writing on it—Minnie’s writing. It was addressed to me, and it told me that Minnie

had left me, not from any want of love, but because she was miserable and unhappy. She said she knew that she had been watched; that a feeling she could not control had compelled her to leave for a time; that she would write again or see me in a few days; and she begged me to believe that no one but herself was to blame for what she had done. She asked me, too, not to be anxious as to how she would live, for she had provided for that.

The first thing I did was to desire Susan to lock the door, and on no account to allow a person to enter the room. For the thought flashed upon me, that if it were known that Minnie had left her home clandestinely, her good name would suffer. She had done a foolish thing—ay, it was a cruel thing to leave me thus; but it was done in all innocence, I am sure, and in ignorance of the world's judgment upon such an act. I, her father, must protect her good name; no breath of slander must be allowed to touch her. Therefore I judged it imperative that the secret of her departure should be known only to Susan and me. I gave Susan the letter to read, and when her tears were dried, my plan was formed. It is well for me that I have such an attached and faithful friend as

Susan. Without her, I should be helpless indeed. I explained my wishes to her, and she promised to obey them implicitly—and she will. The Marvels and Dan and Ellen are to be told that Minnie cannot leave me; that my illness has increased, and I require her constant attendance. And on no pretence whatever is any one of them to be allowed to come into the room. The door is to be always locked, and when Susan goes out of the room, she is to lock the door and take the key with her. I am afraid that Susan judges Joshua even more harshly than I do; for she suggested that she should watch his movements, in the expectation that some clue might be gained. Her evidence of to-day is all in his favour. She ascertained that he went this morning direct from home to his ship; that he worked there for six hours, and that he came home direct to Ellen. No, I cannot associate him with Minnie's disappearance. I have been thinking as coherently as I could as to what is most likely the cause of her leaving home, and the most hopeful conclusion I can arrive at is this: That Minnie has an attachment for Joshua, which, in the face of his engagement with Ellen, she feels it is her duty to subdue; that it is painful to her to be a witness of Ellen's

happiness ; and that, fearful lest she should betray her attachment, she has left the neighbourhood until Joshua has gone upon his voyage.

I am reassured. This conclusion is reasonable as well as hopeful. I must bear with the misery of her absence—ah, how I miss her beloved face !—in the hope that my darling will return to me when he is gone, and that she will regain her peace of mind, and be to me as she has hitherto been ; chastened perhaps, but not entirely unhappy.

Are you thinking of me, Minnie ? Can you realise the depth of my love for you, my dearest ? If such a thing exists in the flesh as spiritual communion with those we love, you will know, darling treasure of my heart ! that my thoughts, my blessings, my prayers are with you now.

* * * * *

In two days Joshua's ship will sail, and then my darling will come home. The secret of her departure has been well kept. No one knows or suspects. There is a rare faithfulness in Susan's nature. If she possessed all the graces of womanhood, she could not be nobler than she is.

I need all my strength to enable me to bear with Minnie's absence ; so constantly do my thoughts dwell upon her, that at certain times I lose con-

sciousness of what has taken place, and detect myself listening for her footstep. At other times I am engrossed by the idea that many years have passed since I last saw Minnie. When this impression is upon me, Minnie appears to me not as a woman, but as a child.

* * * *

Joshua Marvel has gone. Thank God! Now I may expect Minnie to return. Any moment may bring her to my loving arms again. I am haunted by the ghosts of footsteps on the stairs. I know afterwards that my fancy has conjured them up; but if they were real, I could not hear them more plainly. They are Minnie's footsteps always. I hear them first in the passage leading from the street—I stop and listen. Softly yet swiftly they come nearer and nearer to me, till they are outside my door. Then I say to myself, ‘She is lingering for a while, thinking of the happiness I shall feel when she opens the door and runs to my side.’ But the long silence that follows tells me that the steps I heard were created by my fancy, and that I have still to wait for the accomplishment of my dearest hope.

Before Joshua left, he came to the door, and asked to see me and Minnie to bid us good-bye.

His desire to see Minnie was assuring, for it convinced me that the reasons I assigned for her leaving are correct. But I would not see him—I could not; for if he came into the room, he would discover Minnie's absence.

I am thankful to think that my forced seclusion will soon be at an end. How the minutes lag! Come, Minnie! Come, my darling child!

* * * * *

How shall I be able to endure this agony? It is night; yesterday morning Joshua Marvel left to go on his voyage, and there is no sign of Minnie. What can I think? Has any calamity befallen her? Is she lying sick, helpless anywhere, and must I remain here, gnawing my heart away with the knowledge that I am powerless to help her? O God, who only witnesseth my sufferings, send my darling home to me to-night! If in my life I have erred, and deserve punishment—if the injunction I laid upon the woman who loved me, and whom I loved with all my strength, was a crime, and if I am to suffer for the misery of her wedded life, being the cause of it—deal with me as Thou wilt; but let me look once more upon the face of my darling!

* * * * *

The third day. My life is being tortured away. I believe that I shall die before seeing Minnie. The prescience of death is upon me. Every few minutes Susan runs into the street to see if Minnie is coming; but there is no sign of her. The slightest sound in the house causes my heart to beat so violently that I am afraid. I try to think, but I cannot; I can only fear. These few words have taken me long to write. I cannot read what I have previously written. I have tried to do so, but the words swim before my eyes. I can write no more to-day.

* * * * *

With a despairing mind I trace these words slowly and painfully. They are powerless to express my feelings.

Death is near. I know it. Not by physical pain am I warned, but I know it. I saw my wife last night. She stood by my side for full an hour. It is a sign that my hour is come.

Susan is below, looking for Minnie perhaps — looking for Minnie, who will never, never come. . .

I take up my pen again. What lies before me? A letter. Susan brought it up awhile ago, and gave it to me. But when I saw the writing

on the cover, I had not courage to open it, so I placed it in the desk. It is addressed to me in Minnie's writing. And on the cover are these words: 'The Merry Andrew; John Steele, pilot.' The letter, then, comes from the Merry Andrew, and is in Minnie's writing. What follows? That Minnie is on board the Merry Andrew with Joshua Marvel! I must read it—I *must*, if it strike me dead!——

That was all that was written. Dan read every word of the manuscript aloud, but was compelled by emotion to pause many times. During the silence that followed, one thought rose uppermost in their minds. Ellen thought, 'How will Dan bear this?' And Dan had the same thought with respect to Ellen. Is such noble unselfishness rare? Let us hope not. For the first and only time in the course of this narrative, the writer pauses to speak of a personal experience of devotion and unselfishness. It was before him during his boyhood in the person of his mother; and it is to her, and to the patient un murmuring gentleness with which she bore the trials of her life, that her children owe whatever little of good there may be in their nature. It is from his experi-

ence of his mother's life of goodness and self-sacrifice that he knows that the noble unselfishness of Dan and Ellen is not, thank God! a creation of his fancy. And as he writes these words in the midst of a great city, with all the whirl of its busy life around him, he is glad to think that in it—in great mansions and mean houses, in sight of gardens where Nature makes holiday, and of dirty streets and courts where bright leaf never grows—flowers of human life which the world shall never see are blossoming tenderly and holily, and living gentle lives for others' good.

For a long time no word was spoken by Ellen and Dan. Then Dan turned and looked in Ellen's face. She met his gaze pityingly, almost appealingly. He answered her with a sad smile, in which there was much sweetness.

'You were the first to guess my love for Minnie,' he said; 'and only to Jo did I ever confess it. But do not fret for me, my dear; she can never be to me what I was daring enough to hope she would be one day. My love for her is not less strong, but my hope is buried now.'

She could say nothing but 'O my poor Dan! O my poor Dan!'

‘Nay, why?’ he answered in his gentle voice; ‘what could I have offered her? What right had I, a cripple, to entertain the hope? I dared to hope that she, bright, strong, and full of healthful life, would tie herself to a weak sickly thing like me. I dared to hope that she would love me. I fed my heart upon delusions; I can see it now. But I can love her still—can believe in her still—shall have faith in her purity as long as my heart shall beat, and after that—ay, who knows?’ He paused for a little while before he resumed: ‘What you and I have in our thoughts, my dear, we must speak of; in that lies our only consolation. And we must not shrink from it; for our duty, no less than our love, demands it.’

And yet she did shrink, fearing what was coming.

‘What wonder that she should love Joshua?’ continued Dan, unflinchingly determined to look the truth in the face, and not to spare himself, although as he spoke his quivering lips and tremulous voice betrayed his agitation. ‘We who know how good and brave he is are able to understand that she could not help loving him. But he—no, he played no false part by her.’ He placed his hand upon the Bible, and the action

gave a deeper solemnity to the declaration. ‘Some suspicion he may have entertained that her feelings towards him were warmer than they ought to have been; and I well know the grief such suspicion brought to him. But he could not mention it—he dared not speak of it for Minnie’s sake—for mine. I can trace a meaning now in the last words he said to me. “You do not doubt me, Dan?” he asked. I answered, “No, nor never could.” And then he said he should not have asked, but that certain things had distressed him lately. Poor Jo! Yes, he must have guessed Minnie’s secret, and, knowing my love for her, trembled lest I should turn against him. Turn against him! my best, my dearest friend! When I do, it will be time for me to die. Believe that I never wavered in my love or my truth, and that to the last I held you in my heart as I hold you now, gentlest, dearest, best of friends!’

Unconsciously he had uttered the very words which Joshua addressed to him, and he spoke them as if Joshua were standing before him.

‘As for what we have read to-night, we and we alone can rightly understand it. He who wrote it in his agony knows now that Joshua’s heart is as pure as Minnie’s honour.’

‘Those strange letters poor Minnie’s father received,’ whispered Ellen; ‘who wrote them?’

‘Who stabbed Jo when he came home?’ asked Dan in reply. ‘Whoever did that wrote the letters. Jo has an enemy.’ Then, with a sudden remembrance of Joshua’s warning against Solomon Fewster, he cried in a louder tone than he had hitherto used, ‘Mr. Fewster!’ With eager impatience he turned over the pages of Basil Kindred’s diary, and lighted upon the original letters. They were pinned on blank pages at the end of the diary, and were written on soiled sheets of blue letter-paper. ‘No,’ said Dan, examining them; ‘the writing is strange to me. We must wait until Jo comes back; all will be explained then.’

The candle had burnt low in the socket by this time, and Dan had just said, ‘I think we had better try to sleep for a little while, Ellen,’ when they heard sounds of some one walking softly about the house.

‘There is no one here but Susan,’ said Ellen, in a tone of quiet surprise.

‘No one but——’ said Dan, and then paused, awestruck by the thought of that only other one in the house, which lay stark and dead in the room above.

They listened to Susan's footsteps, and a new fear entered their hearts. There was a soft stealthiness in the footfall, as if Susan were hunting for some one who was hiding from her.

‘ Shall I go and see ? ’ asked Ellen.

‘ Hush ! ’ whispered Dan.

Susan's footsteps, soft and stealthy as those of a cat, were in the passage. Presently the door was opened cautiously, and Susan entered, and softly closed the door behind her. She did not notice either Dan or Ellen, but looked about the room inquiringly, then went to the window and pulled up the blind. The moon was high in the heavens, and the light streamed down upon her face, making it ghastly.

‘ Susan ! ’ cried Dan.

But she did not heed him ; she peered anxiously through the window into the street, shading her eyes with her hand.

‘ Is she asleep ? ’ whispered Ellen.

‘ I don't know,’ said Dan in a troubled voice ; ‘ it is dreadful to see her with that expression on her face.’

It was an expression of suppressed watchfulness ; that her firmly-compressed lips and wandering eyes were at variance might have been due to

the peculiar circumstances of her life ; but in the cunning and revengeful determination in her face there was no sign of indecision. It was as though she had staked her life on the accomplishment of a task.

As she turned from the window and approached Dan, he seized her hand.

‘ Susan,’ he said gently, ‘ speak to me, my dear. What is the meaning of this ?’

She laid her hand upon his head, and said,

‘ Poor Dan ! And you loved her, and she is lost to you.’

‘ Not lost, Susey,’ he said, detaining her hand and humouring her, for he was afraid that her reason was gone ; ‘ not lost. She will come back.’

‘ She will never come back—never, never ! When she hears that *he* is dead—he is lying dead up-stairs, Dan—she will never come back ; she will drown herself first ; for she loved him, and me too ; and would have loved you, Dan, but for that false-hearted friend.’

‘ You must not say that, Susey,’ said Dan, pointing to Ellen, who had turned aside weeping. ‘ Look at Ellen. He is her husband, and he is not false-hearted. For her sake you must have kinder, juster thoughts towards Jo.’

But Susan did not catch the sense of his words. All that she understood was, that he was speaking in defence of Joshua.

‘All in his favour,’ she muttered. ‘If any one is to blame, it is Minnie—that’s what all of you will say. But I know better ; I know better. Didn’t I watch them ? Didn’t I see him making love to her on the ship ? Didn’t I see the poor dear that’s lying dead up-stairs tortured slowly to death ? And don’t I know who killed him ?’

‘Who, Susan, who ?’ asked Dan, holding his breath.

‘Joshua Marvel,’ said Susan, between her set teeth, with no change upon her face. ‘And as God’s my judge, I will bring him to justice ! You are his friends—I know that ; you’ll try to hide him from me ; but I’ll do what I’ve made up my mind to, if I drop down dead the minute after.’

She twisted her hand from Dan’s grasp, and crept slowly into the passage, and thence into the street. And there she stood for many minutes, with the same expression of implacable animosity on her face, waiting for the return of Basil Kindred’s murderer.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT THE NEIGHBOURS THINK OF IT.

THE events that have been described proved to be something more than a nine-days' wonder. The neighbourhood was remarkably bare of exciting incidents, and nothing so stirring as the sudden death of Basil Kindred and the flight of Minnie had happened within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Besides that, there was one element in the occurrences which, above all others, added zest and flavour to them—this was the element of mystery. Here was a family, which might be looked upon as the most respected family in the neighbourhood; for there was no question about the position held by the Marvels. Every one of the neighbours liked them, and every one of the neighbours had a good word for them. They had lived in the neighbourhood—they and their fathers and grandfathers before them—for many scores of

years, and no shadow of reproach had ever rested upon a single member of the family. They had always been steady, industrious, and sober, and had been held up as examples, time out of mind, by wives to their husbands, and parents to their children. They were homely, hospitable, and sociable, and, although they might very well have done it, had never held their heads above their fellows. If any male acquaintance wanted a word of advice, he went to Mr. Marvel for it; and the advice received was generally found to be sound, and was always admitted to be good. If any one was sick, Mrs. Marvel always came forward to help and assist, in her small way, and was always ready to sit up of a night if it were necessary, and to do some portion of the household work if it were needed. And what she did was done so unostentatiously and quietly that it never left a sting behind it, and never—strange as it may sound—elicited anything but gratitude. Joshua was a model of a son, and the neighbours had been proud of him. Take them for all in all, the Marvels were a credit to the locality. And yet, as you shall presently see, notwithstanding their irreproachable character, notwithstanding the credit in which they were held, notwithstanding that

they were famous for all the virtues under the sun, a very remarkable change was to take place in the estimation in which they were held.

Then as to the Taylors. There had been many transitions of feeling regarding them when the parents were alive. They had not been a credit to the neighbourhood. The meek uncomplaining life which Mrs. Taylor had led had been entirely lost sight of in the drunken dissolute habits of the head of the family. Perhaps it was because of this bad conduct on the part of Mr. Taylor that the virtues of the good wife had not been taken into account; and the fact remained, that it was not until after Mr. Taylor's death—the manner of which was disgraceful, and left a blot upon the family name—that any strong affection was mingled with the pity with which Dan and Ellen were regarded. There were so many singular circumstances connected with the family history. First, there was Susan letting Dan fall out of window when he was a baby and breaking his legs. Many of the neighbours, with young families of their own, remembered the time when they were boys and girls, and when Susan was twitted and jeered at for being Dan's murderer. Then Susan's strange manner and slovenly dress

—not, it must be admitted, that her slovenliness had very much to do with the feeling—had not rendered her a favourite; and she was often spoken of as being soft and not quite right in her mind.

Then came that part of Mr. Taylor's career when (it having been whispered about that he had been the death of his wife) he fell into deeper and deeper dissipation, and when he was to be seen regularly every night tumbling out of the public-house, and reeling home in a state of intoxication. It is surprising how hard many wives, whose husbands were not quite free from the reproach of over-indulgence, were upon the failings of Mr. Taylor. He was a 'drunken beast,' a 'disgrace to the street,' and so forth. And yet, as you have seen, they were proud of the beautiful friendship that existed between Dan and Joshua, and appreciated the good conduct of Ellen from the time that she was big enough—she was young enough, heaven knows, when her duties commenced—to assist in the cleaning and washing. But the father's drunken habits stained the family reputation, and not all the washing and wringing could wash it clean at that time. Then came the shameful death of the drunkard. From the date of that occurrence, the position of the family began to

improve, and the engagement of Ellen and Joshua lifted them up still farther in the estimation of their neighbours.

Lastly, there were Basil Kindred and Minnie. Neither of them had ever been favourites out of their own small circle. Basil Kindred had held his head above them, and Minnie was too much of a lady for 'such poor folks as us.' All the grown-up girls disliked her because she was superior to them, and because she did not associate with them. Therefore neither father nor daughter obtained sympathy, and there was very little pity expressed for Basil's death. As for Minnie, she was generally condemned. The neighbours in speaking of her and her flight said, 'she was always a forward thing;' and some even went so far as to call her a 'stuck-up slut.' They never expected anything better of her, not they.

The mystery was, how it all became known; for it was known, every detail of it, the day following that on which Basil Kindred had died. Every person, for a dozen streets round about, knew all the particulars almost as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Marvel were made acquainted with them—knew that Minnie had run away, knew that she was in Joshua Marvel's ship, knew that the intel-

ligence of the flight had caused her father's death. Then they began to be wise in their generation, after the usual manner of human herds, and before nightfall of the second day it was recognised as an established fact, that it had been a cunningly-planned plot from first to last, and that Joshua and Minnie had run away together.

There is no accounting for these revulsions of feeling, and it is perhaps best not to attempt to analyse them. So much small malice and miserable uncharitableness would be brought to light, that we should be ashamed of the exposure—being liable to such influences ourselves. Joshua's character had hitherto been irreproachable; he had been almost loved by many, and liked and admired by all. Suddenly he is tainted by suspicion, and by suspicion only. There is not a tittle of direct evidence against him. But the suspicion is enough; directly it is whispered, it swells and grows, like the cloud which is at first 'no bigger than a man's hand,' and Joshua's good name is wrecked in the storm that follows.

The additional grief that this general verdict inflicted upon Joshua's parents may easily be imagined. They had to learn that slander's 'edge is sharper than the sword,' and that though their dear

son were 'chaste as ice and pure as snow, he should not escape calumny.' But they did not receive these lessons meekly. They fought and protested against them with all the strength of their loving souls. They might as well have tried to stop a fierce wind with the palms of their hands.

One of their bitterest experiences was the knowledge that there was a difference of sentiment between them. They did not all believe alike. All of them, except Susan, believed alike in the innocence and purity of Joshua ; but not so with respect to Minnie. The mercy that Dan and Ellen accorded to her was denied to her by Mr. and Mrs. Marvel. Neither of them thought well of her ; and although Mrs. Marvel's verdict was less harsh than that of her husband, she too, gentle and forgiving as was her nature, could not forgive and hold dear the unhappy girl who had brought this great misery upon them. What Minnie had done was nothing less than a crime in the eyes of the good mother and good woman.

But Minnie had one champion—Susan. It was generally reported, a few days after the tragic occurrence, that Susan had gone mad because of Basil Kindred's death ; and a whisper went about, that, mad as she was, she was fixed to the one

idea of bringing Joshua to justice. Susan's madness, if madness it was, took a very mild form. She did not speak upon the subject, but she believed thoroughly in Minnie's innocence and Joshua's guilt; and she was ever on the watch to bring that false friend to justice. She was always peering about her and hunting for Joshua. She contracted a strange habit of suspecting that he was hiding in the place she last left, and when she went out of the house, returned, after going a few paces, to see if the man she was waiting for was in the passage. If she opened a gate and shut it behind her, she walked back to it and looked about her, expectant. Never a night passed but she rose from her bed and went into the street, waiting for Joshua; in the dead of night, when all others were asleep, she would sit at her window and look into the street, waiting patiently. When they discovered this habit at home, they tried to break her of it; but their efforts were unavailing. By and by, this proceeding began to be exceedingly popular in the neighbourhood, and popular opinion veered round to Susan's view; Minnie was not so thoroughly condemned, and the blame was entirely laid on Joshua's shoulders. And when the neighbours openly expressed

their sympathy to Mr. Marvel because Joshua had 'turned out bad,' he resented it angrily in his dogmatic obstinate way, until he began to quarrel with them. He was so indignant, so hurt, so unhappy, that he refused to speak to his old acquaintances, and gradually they fell off from him, and a coldness sprang up which made his life a misery. Still, he and all that were bound to him cherished the hope that when Joshua came home all would be cleared up. But Mr. Marvel made up his mind that he would never forgive his neighbours for their suspicions. Months passed, and the estrangement between him and his acquaintances grew stronger; his home, too, was not a happy one. He grew morose and ill-tempered, and would not speak to his wife upon the subject of Joshua and Minnie; and when she found that he was determined upon this point, she wisely forbore to press him, knowing his nature.

Before the advent of another spring, Ellen became a mother. Her situation had been concealed from all but Dan and Mrs. Marvel; even Mr. Marvel did not know it until the child was born. It was a girl; and when the news was buzzed about the neighbourhood, Joshua and

Minnie started again into a notoriety which had been on the wane. Again the busybodies were at work, and again the busy tongues wagged more volubly than before. It was a matter for resentment with the neighbours that they had not been made acquainted with Ellen's situation; it was depriving them of a legitimate privilege. But Ellen and her two confidants had kept the secret well; and now the young mother nursed her child in privacy, and seemed only anxious to keep it from prying and unsympathising eyes. No news had been received of Joshua or of his ship; and although Mr. Marvel went every other day to the London agents of the Merry Andrew, they had nothing to tell him. Now that the child was born, their anxiety for news of Joshua increased. But still they received none. Weeks passed, months passed, until the suspense became almost maddening. Ellen nursed the baby, and rejoiced that the pretty little thing had Joshua's eyes, and yearned for Joshua to see them. Mr. Marvel looked more angrily upon his old acquaintances, who were ready to quarrel with him afresh for his sour looks. Mrs. Marvel suffered in patience, and strove by assumed cheerfulness to lighten the loads the others had to bear. Susan waited and

watched. And Dan waited and hoped——When there came a time!——

Ellen was in Mrs. Marvel's kitchen; her baby was in her lap, and she was gazing at and worshipping, for the thousandth thousandth time, the baby's beautiful eyes, and beautiful fingers and nails, and the round cheeks, and the pretty mouth and chin, so like Joshua's. It was evening, and Mr. Marvel was expected home every minute, with news from the agents about Joshua's ship. Ellen began singing this to baby—singing in a low soft voice how father would soon come from over the seas to see his own little darling—his dear darling precious; and she was in the midst of this, enriching the theme with twenty different forms of endearing expression, when Mr. Marvel staggered into the kitchen. There was a wild look in his face, and his hands were trembling. He was drunk.

‘O, father!’ cried Ellen.

‘Where's mother?’ he asked in a husky voice.

‘Where's mother?’ he repeated in a louder tone.

His wife answered the question by coming into the kitchen. She had seen him reel into the house, and had followed him at once. She knew he had been drinking, but she did not reproach

him. He saw in her face the knowledge and the forbearance, and he said,

‘Yes, I’ve been drinking; I was bound to. O, mother, mother! how shall I tell you?’

Her lips framed some words, but she could not utter them. She sank into a chair and gazed at him with blanched cheek, with quivering lips, with blurred eyes.

Hush, baby, hush! you have never seen your father’s face, and you do not understand now what one day will be told you—what George Marvel has had to drink brandy to give him courage to tell his faithful wife—

That the good ship, the Merry Andrew, has foundered, and that every soul on board, Joshua and Minnie included, has gone down to the bottom of the sea. Not one saved—not one.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON BOARD THE MERRY ANDREW.

WHILE the Merry Andrew was lying at Blackwall taking in cargo, Captain Liddle, like the shrewd captain he was, had caused it to be notified that he would be happy to take a certain number of passengers to the New World at fifty pounds per head. It happened, as it usually happens in such-like cases, that just at that time the exact number of persons that the ship could accommodate found either that Great Britain was too crowded for them to move freely in, or that at length the hour had arrived for them to make a fresh start in life. The captain of the Merry Andrew offered them the necessary opportunity. His ship would take them to a country where they would be able to turn without being elbowed. And there was no doubt that the start they contemplated would be a fresh one, inasmuch as in the new land their heads would be where their feet were now, and

night was day and day night, and cherries grew with their stones outside, and many other wonders were commonplaces of every-day life. Accordingly, these enterprising souls, much to Captain Liddle's satisfaction, paid their fifty pounds per head for four months of quiet misery on the sea. By that stroke of business Captain Liddle served two purposes. He put money in his pocket as chief owner of the vessel, and he provided society for his wife, who was to accompany him on the voyage. Mrs. Liddle was a cheerful little body, who, although she was thirty years of age, had as much sentiment as a tender-hearted miss of eighteen. Her engagement with Captain Liddle had been a long one. It was now more than twelve years since she first saw him and fell in love with him, as he did with her; but she happened to be blessed in a father who entertained not uncommon ideas as to the value of money and as to the difference it made in a man, especially in a man who presumed to fall in love with his daughter. At that time Captain Liddle was only second mate, and his matrimonial overtures were pooh-poohed by Captain Prue, which was the name and title of his wife's father; Bessie Prue was hers. Captain Prue (retired from the service) declared that

he loved sailors and loved the sea, and that nothing would please him better than that his Bessie should marry a sailor. But then, that sailor must be a captain, he declared, and that captain must be absolute owner of the ship he commanded. Having passed the principal part of his life on sea, in a position where his word was law, he was, as most old sea-captains are, intolerant of opposition. Having given the word, he would not depart from it. Consequently, second-mate Liddle found that all his arguments and rhapsodies were as wind—a fluid which is much more useful at sea than on land, however it is produced. Bessie, as it proved, possessed a goodly share of her old father's determination of character. Having fallen in love with second-mate Liddle, and having determined to marry him or die an old maid, she informed her lover that if he would be faithful to her, she would be faithful to him—a form of declaration which has been very popular from time immemorial. The pledge being sealed by the infatuated ones in the usual manner—that is, with much protestation, with much unnecessary solemnity (as if they were doomed to execution, and were to be beheaded within a few hours), with many kisses and tender embracings—Bessie went

to her father and apprised him, melodramatically, of her determination.

‘You wouldn’t marry without my consent, my pretty?’ was the obstinate old captain’s question, after a little consideration. They were absurdly happy, these two determined persons. Bessie was the apple of his eye, the pride of his heart; she had not a wish, except the wish matrimonial, that he would not have made any sacrifice to satisfy. ‘You wouldn’t marry without my consent, my pretty?’ he repeated anxiously, for she did not answer his question immediately.

‘I won’t, on one condition,’ replied Bessie categorically; ‘and that is, that you won’t ask me, or wish me, or try to persuade me to marry anybody but John Liddle; for I love him with all my heart, and I wouldn’t give him up—no, not to be made Lord High Admiral.’

‘I give you my promise, my pretty,’ said Captain Prue, secretly admiring his daughter’s determination, and loving her the more for it; ‘I’ll never ask you, nor wish you, nor try to persuade you to marry anybody but John Liddle.’

It may be guessed how willingly the old sea-captain gave the pledge, when it is known that he looked forward with absolute dread to the time

when Bessie might be taken from him to another home. He would give her anything, help her to anything but a husband. What right had anybody else to her? Why, the ship would go on the rocks without her! 'And when John Liddle is skipper and owns a ship,' he added, 'I'll give my consent free and willing.' In which last words Captain Prue was not quite ingenuous. But the compact was made and adhered to. Second-mate Liddle was informed of it, and was compelled to abide by it. He trusted to chance, as many other men, not lovers, have done before him; and he derived consolation from the thought, that when Captain Prue and Bessie pledged their word, it would need something very extraordinary and unlooked-for to induce them to break it. He rose from second mate to first mate, from first mate to skipper; and when he returned from his voyages, he found Bessie faithful and true, and received a hearty welcome from her father. And during these long and many years of probation, he learned to love his true-hearted little woman more deeply than he had done at first; she taught him to understand what love really was; she taught him the true beauty of it, the holiness of it—that it was something more than a sentiment,

something higher than a passion ; she taught him to understand that it was a sacrament.

It seems fated for this story that its narration should necessitate, for the most part, the depicting of the higher virtues, and what is most noble and self-sacrificing in our natures. But it should be none the less acceptable because of that.

A short time after Bessie's lover became skipper, a relative of his died and left him some money. Directly he came into possession of it, he bought a share in the *Merry Andrew*. Bessie was then twenty-six years of age, as pretty as ever and as fresh at heart as ever. One would have thought that her father would have spoken to her of his own accord, there and then, and that he would have given her the reward of her faithfulness and devotion. But the truth must be told : he was a selfish old curmudgeon, and he trembled at the thought of losing her. So once more Captain Liddle sailed away from his lady-love on the voyage in which our Joshua commenced his apprenticeship at sea. The *Merry Andrew* was away, as you know, for more than four years ; and when it returned and Captain Liddle went to see his Bessie, he found her in mourning. Her father was dead. Before he died he had made her the only repara-

tion in his power. The last codicil to his will, written a few weeks before his death, contained expressions of his love for her, his admiration of her lover, his consent to their marriage, and his regret that he had not consented to it years ago. But it is so easy to regret *after* a thing has occurred which we might have prevented or remedied. I have not yet made up my mind as to the value of death-bed repentance. Neither am I satisfied that we may sin properly for six days in the week, in a comfortable knowledge that we can evade the penalty by crying, 'I have sinned!' on the Sabbath.

However, the departed Captain Prue had been in all other respects a kind and tender father, and no word of reproach passed the lips of Bessie and John Liddle. They were not too old for the enjoyment of life's blessings. Two months before the present sailing of the Merry Andrew they were married, and it is not to be doubted that the circumstances of their engagement promised them a lasting happiness.

Mrs. Liddle had a maid, a beautiful brown-complexioned girl, whose appearance might have suggested some suspicion of a gipsy-breed, had it not been for her manners, which showed a refine-

ment no gipsy-girl could have acquired in her vagrant life, and for her eyes, which were gray despite their brightness. The circumstances of her becoming Mrs. Liddle's maid were somewhat peculiar. She had presented herself to that lady a few days before the Merry Andrew sailed, and stating that she had heard by accident that Mrs. Liddle wanted a maid to accompany her on the voyage, asked to be engaged in that capacity. There was something so winsome about the girl, that Mrs. Liddle—who had not succeeded in engaging a maid willing to brave the terrors of a sea-voyage—was at once attracted to her, and lent a sympathising ear to her story of being alone in the world and without friends. Perhaps it was Mrs. Liddle's romantic happiness that caused her to be less prudent than usual; but certain it is that the girl was engaged, and, setting about her duties at once, proved so apt and attentive, that Mrs. Liddle congratulated herself upon her decision. Captain Liddle did not interfere in the matter; but when he first saw the girl her face seemed familiar to him, and he glanced at her more than once, wondering where he had met her. But he could not settle the doubt, and the matter was not of sufficient importance to permanently

engage his attention. Thus it was that Minnie succeeded in obtaining a passage in the *Merry Andrew*, and in being near to the man who was dearer to her than all other earthly considerations. She was not influenced by any dishonouring passion; she simply desired not to be parted from the man she loved. She did not want him to see her or speak to her—at least, so she thought at that time; it was sufficient for her to know that she was in the same ship with him, and that she would perhaps now and again catch a glimpse of her hero, without his knowing that she was by. When she first made up her mind to leave her home, she did not pause to consider what would be the consequences of her rash act. She was unhappy there and utterly miserable; everybody was against her; and when she discovered, as she did discover, that Susan was playing the spy upon her, she became defiant and more resolved. She loved her father and honoured him; but she loved Joshua with all the passion of her passionate nature, and in her mistaken sense of right and wrong, the stronger love usurped the place of duty, and made her oblivious of all else. She was blinded by love, and by love in which there was not a shade of impure passion.

She had had at first a wild idea of dressing herself in sailor's clothes, and had saved a few shillings towards the purchasing of them ; but her success with Mrs. Liddle set that aside. When she went on to the ship with her mistress, she was careful that Joshua should not see her ; but indeed, if they had met face to face at that time, it is not likely that he would have recognised her in her disguise ; for his thoughts were with Ellen, and his heart was too full as yet to be curious about the passengers. But the Lascar saw her, and was puzzled about her directly he set eyes upon her face. He watched her like a cat, and yet he could not make up his mind about her. He had seen her often in Stepney, but he could scarcely believe that the fair girl with the beautiful hair and this dark gipsy with the short curls were one and the same. He knew her name and all about her from Solomon Fewster, and he was quite ready to believe in the villany of Joshua. Resolved to make sure of the value of his suspicions, he contrived to pass close by her as she was taking some bandboxes downstairs to the saloon, and as he passed her, he muttered the name of 'Minnie Kindred.' A start, a frightened look over her shoulders, and the dropping of the bandboxes down the stairs, were suffi-

cient confirmation of his doubts ; and before the pilot left the ship he gave him a scrawl for Solomon Fewster, to the effect that Joshua and Minnie had run away together. He was cautious enough also to send upon another piece of paper a private scrawl to Solomon Fewster, saying he was not quite sure, but that Fewster would know how to act if Minnie were missing from home.

But when the Lascar next saw Minnie's face, which was not until the Merry Andrew was a thousand miles the other side of the Bay of Biscay, his doubts returned, and he thought that, after all, he must have been mistaken. He did not know the cunning of Minnie. In the startled glance she had thrown over her shoulder when her name was pronounced, she had marked the Lascar's face, so that she was sure she would know it again ; and when, after the lapse of weeks, she detected him gazing at her, she looked at him so boldly and contemptuously that he drooped his eyes before her. What added to his perplexity was, that he never saw Joshua speak to her, never saw him look at her. When she came on deck, which she did very rarely, and never unless her duty to her mistress called her there, she was careful not to give Joshua an opportunity of speaking to her or of

looking closely at her ; and he, detecting in her manner a wish to avoid any little attention he might have it in his mind to offer her, did not trouble himself even by giving her a thought. She was as distant and reserved to all the officers ; and in a little while it began to be understood, that the handsome gipsy-maid did not wish to be spoken to by any one on board but her mistress ; and her wish was scrupulously respected.

To readers who are not well acquainted with ship-life, it may seem strange that Minnie should have been able to keep herself so free from observation ; but there really can be—and there often is—as much exclusiveness on board a passenger-ship as there is in society on land. You may live in a ship for months, and travel for thousands upon thousands of miles over the seemingly interminable waste of waters, without having any more personal knowledge of those who sleep within a few yards of you than you would have of them if you and they were living at the extreme ends of a great city. When the long, long voyage is at an end, and the ship is being piloted into the bay that skirts the land of Pisgah, men and women whom you do not remember ever to have seen before appear magically on deck ; and you

wonder where they come from, and how it is you have not set eyes on them during all the time that you and they have been living in the wonderful house of wood and iron that has brought you safely over the raging seas.

Joshua knew the Lascar directly he saw him on board, and was not pleased to find that he was one of the crew. But the man did his duty, and worked as well and apparently as willingly as the other sailors ; and as he was uniformly respectful, Joshua could not, even if he had been so inclined, treat him harshly with any sense of justice.

And so the Merry Andrew, containing within its wooden walls its load of human love and hate, cleaves through the ocean onward to its goal steadily and patiently, while before it, with every new rising of the sun, a monotonous hill of waters, never varying, never changing, lies in the gray distance mocking its progress. Through cold weather, through hot weather, burnt up in the torrid zone, and chilled by winds which rush from ice-bound waters ; through days when scarce a ripple can be seen on the grand ocean's breast, and others when the waves leap at its throat furiously, as an enemy might do ; through nights when the moon rises threateningly in the hea-

vens, like a blazing ball of lurid fire, suggesting thoughts of a dreadful to-morrow; and through dark nights, solemnly beautiful when the track of the vessel is marked by the brilliant medusæ (the sailor's girdle of Venus) which gleam and shine—a line of living light—in the wondrous sea: through all these, with unerring faith, the ship pursues its way steadily and patiently to the garden of the world. Now the captain smells the breeze, and hoarse cries, unintelligible to all but the initiated, travel about the ship to clap on sail and make good use of the breath of Boreas. Then the ship dashes on like a god drunk with joy, dives into awful depths, and climbs water-mountains that a moment ago threatened to fall in upon it and dash it to pieces. The curling seas break over the deck, and the toilers that are battling with wind and wave cling fast for dear life to ropes and spars; while ever and anon a water-titan, more angry than his fellows, breaks against the side with such tremendous force that the vessel reels and quivers beneath the mighty shock. So! the breeze slackens and dies away; the anger of the sea subsides, and after many days the ship is becalmed. Then the passengers lie about the white deck in happy indolence, and

muse and dream of the great whale they saw awhile ago, hung round with sea-weed and barnacles ; of the cloudless night, star-gemmed above and below ; of the beautiful Southern Cross and the strange Magellan clouds ; and while they muse and dream, the white sky stares down lazily into blue peaceful waters. Every one on board is contented with the change, excepting the skipper, who paces the deck restlessly and prays for the breeze to spring up — taking advantage of the calm, however, like the good skipper he is, to splice ropes, and make new sails and mend old ones. Soon wind and water wake into life again, and the waves sparkle, and the fresh breeze blows merrily, when a sudden cry rings through the ship that a man is overboard. The next moment every soul on board is bending over the bulwarks, watching the retreating form of the sailor, who is floating on his back, gazing with agonising dread at the cruel beaks of the swan-white albatrosses, which are already hovering above him. Quickly the ship is put about ; a boat, with rowers in it, is lowered into the sea ; and after the lapse of many anxious moments a wild cheer rings through the air, as the man, saved from death, is dragged into the boat. He tells afterwards to eager listeners

—he is a notable man on board from that day forth—how it seemed to him that he was floating on his back for full a day, and how the only fear he felt was, that the albatrosses would pick out his eyes. Then the following week a young man died who was in a consumption when he was first brought on to the ship, and who had hoped that the warm breezes of the South would give him a new lease of life; but he was never to breathe the balmy southern air. The little colony of human beings is very sad when the funeral service is read over the body, and the canvas coffin slips with a dull thud into the sea; and a fear arises that some calamity is near. And surely that night there is a fearful storm. The wind howls and roars; heavy seas dash down the two men at the wheel; the sails split into a thousand shreds; masts and spars crack like reeds. The sobs and lamentations of the passengers are dreadful to hear. Minnie, creeping from her cabin into the saloon, sees a dozen men and women, half-dressed, on their knees, praying for mercy and forgiveness, making vows of reformation, and indulging in all the fear-impelled evidences of a suddenly awakened contrition. Pursued by the conviction that in a few minutes she and all in the ship will

meet their doom, she yearns with all her soul to see Joshua, to touch him, to whisper in his ear that Minnie is by his side. Then, if he will but take her hand, she will be content to go down with him into the solemn depths of the awful sea. She creeps to the wet stairs leading to the deck, only to find that the hatches are fastened down, and that she is a prisoner. She tears at the cruel door that separates her from Joshua, until her fingers bleed and her strength gives way. She calls aloud to him, but she cannot hear her own voice, so weak is it and so overwhelming is the roar of the storm. She sinks, despairing, at the foot of the stairs, and in the agony of her mind and the terror of the time so entirely loses consciousness, that the cold waters which steal down the hatchway are powerless to arouse her. But with the next rising of the sun the storm has passed away, and the captain looks joyful, and the sailors sing blithely at their work, and the passengers forget their vows of reformation. So the ship sails on and on, until land is sighted, and the passengers begin to prepare their best clothes to go on shore in. Then comes a quiet evening when the Merry Andrew drops quietly down the beautiful bay, and as evening deepens into night,

a thousand twinkling lights from distant hills welcome the wanderers and gladden their hearts. How peaceful, how lovely, is the night! The balmy air, the restful sound of dipping oars, the floating strains of music that come from a neighbouring ship, the beautiful star-lit waters—all these bring grateful feelings to weary travellers, and silent prayers of thankfulness arise to heaven for the mercy that has brought them safely through the perils of the mighty sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WRECK OF THE MERRY ANDREW.

BUILT in the bed of a beautiful valley and on gardened slopes rising from the waters which run to the sea, lies Sydney, the fair city of the South. It is spring, although the month is October. The heavens are bright with bright clouds, the air is sweet with perfume from tree and flower, the bay is gemmed with gardened isles and promontories. Outside the heads which protect the bay and make it a safe refuge for mighty fleets, the sea dashes against hoary rocks which stand defiant of its wrath; but to-day, swayed by the influence of smiling sun and cloud, the grim old walls sport with the huge waves, splinter them into silver spray, and send them, laughing, back into the sea. In the fair land girt by the blue waters of the South Pacific are orange-groves, the fragrance of whose snow-white blossoms is in harmony with

the time and place, and coral-trees with bright scarlet flower, and trees of peach, loquat, and bread, and hill-slopes where the vines grow, and myriad other evidences of Nature's beneficence. All things that see the light contribute to the beauty of spring.

' 'Tis the garden of the world,' said Captain Liddle to his wife, as they stood apart from the others on board the *Merry Andrew*; ' 'tis the garden of the world,' he repeated, gazing at the lovely hills and gloriously-tinted sky with that sense of gratitude which it is so good for a man to experience.

Her thoughts were in harmony with his, but she did not answer him immediately. She, too, was sensible of the beautiful scene around them, and stood by his side in silent thankfulness. Tomorrow the *Merry Andrew*, having discharged her cargo, and taken in another (chiefly hardwood), was to set sail for China, where she had a charter for London. It was of London—of home—that the captain's wife was thinking, and presently her thoughts found simple expression.

' Yes, John,' she said; ' it is indeed a garden—a beautiful garden; but it is not home.'

' Why now, Bessie,' said the Captain, looking

down smilingly upon the wife he had waited and worked for as anxiously as Jacob did for Rachel, 'could you not content yourself here?'

'All my life, John?'

'All your life, my dear.'

'No,' she said without hesitation; 'I should always be pining for home. Even if we were poor, and it were a necessity that we should live here, I don't think I could manage to quite content myself. But as it is——'

'As it is, Bessie——' repeated her husband, in secret delight at his wife's enthusiasm.

'As it is, John,' she responded softly, 'there's no place like home.'

Captain Liddle hummed a few bars of the Englishman's household hymn; and then, looking to that part of the ship where Joshua was busy, said: 'There is some one on board, Bessie, who is even more anxious to get home than you are.'

'Who can that be, John?'

'My handsome mate, as you call him, Joshua Marvel. He was expressing his delight to me yesterday that we should be not away longer than we thought we should when we started. And when I asked him what made him so impatient

to get home, he told me that he was married three days before we left Gravesend. How would *you* have liked that ?

‘ I wouldn’t have allowed you to go,’ said Mrs. Liddle, with a very positive shake of the head.

‘ Easily said, little woman ; not so easily managed, though, if I had been third mate instead of captain. Thank your stars that you married a captain.’

‘ So I do, John,’ said Mrs. Liddle tenderly—so tenderly, that her husband would have stooped and kissed her, if they had been alone. ‘ Was it a love-match ?’

‘ Marvel’s ? Certainly, I should say. When I went to his house in London to see him, I saw a very beautiful girl in his room. Perhaps it is to her that he is married.’

‘ Very beautiful, sir !’ exclaimed Mrs. Liddle, with a toss of her head. ‘ I am almost inclined to take you to task for that ; but I’ll ask you, instead, to describe her.’

‘ I can’t, Bess ; ’tis not in my line. I tell you what, though : your maid would be like her, if she was fair instead of brown, and if she had long hair.’

‘ Making eyes at my maid, sir !’ cried Mrs.

Liddle, with a pretty wilfulness. ‘When I get you home, I shall lock you up.’

Captain Liddle laughed, and pinched his wife’s cheek.

‘I am glad it was a love-match,’ she said; ‘I like Mr. Marvel all the better for that. You ought to do something for him.’

‘I shouldn’t be surprised, Bessie, if Marvel was second mate on our next voyage,’ was the Captain’s reply. ‘Now go and see to the stowing away of your curiosities.’

During the time that the Merry Andrew had been lying in Sydney Harbour, Mrs. Liddle and her gipsy maid had been living on shore, and had only come on board to-day. Her husband’s last remark referred to a number of parcels which were scattered about the poop, containing curiosities she had collected in that strange new world—such as feathers and skins, and curious weapons and plants—designed to astonish her friends at home.

Captain Liddle’s intention to promote Joshua had been quietly whispered by the sailors to one another for some weeks past, although the Captain, from motives of prudence and a proper regard for discipline, had made no mention of his intention, even to his wife, until now. Captain

Liddle respected Joshua, and often engaged him in familiar conversation. He saw much to admire in the young sailor, and recognised in him qualities, both intellectual and professional, of a far higher standard than those exhibited by his other officers. A sailor more deeply impressed than Joshua was with the highest qualification a sailor can possess, duty, never walked the deck of a ship; and this merit, added to a quick natural intelligence, made him a great favourite with Captain Liddle. He was much liked, also, by the sailors; for while his sense of duty made him firm, his kindness of heart made him gentle. Sailors resemble women in one particular: the more they respect a man, the better they like him. Joshua, however, had two bitter enemies on board: one was the Lascar, who was compelled to conceal his hate; the other was the second mate, Scadbolt by name, who made no secret of his animosity. Scadbolt, being both an inefficient officer and one who liked to shirk his work, had been sharply spoken to by Captain Liddle on several occasions. From this may have sprung the rumour of his intended deposition; and when it reached his ears, it made him venomous. Between Scadbolt and the Lascar about this time

there sprang up a kind of intelligence with regard to Joshua, which boded him no good if he should chance to get into their power. No conversation passed between them on the subject; but each knew instinctively that the other hated the upstart third mate of the Merry Andrew.

With his usual foresight and shrewdness, Captain Liddle had announced his readiness to take a small number of passengers to China, or to London by way of China—rather a roundabout route home, it must be confessed, but one which recommended itself to certain colonists from its novelty, and from the opportunity it afforded them of seeing something of the wonderful land where so many Sons of the Moon lived and had their being. Captain Liddle knew what he was about by stating that he could provide accommodation for only a few passengers, for only a few took passage. Here is the way-bill:

Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon and daughter, the latter five years of age.

Mr. Bracegirdle.

Stephen and Rachel Homebush, brother and sister.

James Heartsease. }

Harry Wall. }

Rough-and-Ready.

So that there were nine passengers in all, including little Emma Pigeon.

The crew numbered twenty-eight persons, all told; and these, with the passengers and the Captain's wife and her maid, made the total number of souls on board thirty-nine.

Mr. Pigeon was the son of a wealthy squatter, who had lately died. Desirous of giving his wife and child better advantages than could be obtained in the colony, he had sold out his property, and was now on his way home, for the purpose of settling in the 'old country.' He was a rough kind of a gentleman at the best, as might be expected of one who had been brought up in the bush; but he had a tender heart, and was passionately devoted to his wife and child. Mrs. Pigeon was a sparkling little creature, full of life and bustle, never still, and with a laugh so merry and contagious, that every soul on board felt glad when it was first heard on the ship. Little Emma, as the child was called, was a small edition of her mother, with precisely the same natural gaiety of disposition. The family were in high glee at the prospect of going 'home' (even Little Emma, born in the bush, had been taught so to call it), and found in the pleasures of imagination some com-

pensation for the natural sorrow they felt in leaving the bright and beautiful land of the South.

Mr. Bracegirdle was a mystery. No one knew anything about him; and as no one inquired, and he was not communicative, his antecedents could only be guessed at.

Steven and Rachel Homebush were a hard-featured morose-looking couple, whose piety was generally recognised as unimpeachable, but whose good-nature was certainly open to question. And this induces the reflection, that it is singular how often piety and sourness go hand-in-hand. It almost seems as if, with the majority of so-called pious people, religious contemplation chills the generous impulse, and hardens the heart instead of softening it. The light of truth falls on them not like a dew, but like a miasma.

James Heartsease and Harry Wall are bracketed in the way-bill, as they were bracketed in heart. They were friends who had travelled together all over the world. They were enthusiastic sketchers; and it was whispered that they were writing a book, which caused them to be looked up to with a kind of veneration.

Rough-and-Ready was as great a mystery as Mr. Bracegirdle, but whereas nothing was known

of Mr. Bracegirdle's antecedents, so many stories were current concerning Rough-and-Ready, that the difficulty was to hit upon the right one. None of them were at all creditable to him. One story was, that he was a bushranger; another, that he was a stockman, who had shot down any number of blacks; another, that he was a runaway convict. The name he chose to go by fitted any one or all of these stories. He engaged his passage in the name of Mr. Rough; but before he had been on board half-an-hour, every sailor knew him as Rough-and-Ready. The lady passengers cast cold looks upon him; but the sailors adored him; and he, taking the aversion of the women and the admiration of the men very philosophically, was as much at home on board the *Merry Andrew* as the Captain himself. Captain Liddle saw nothing objectionable in Rough-and-Ready. He was prone, as you know, to form his own judgments of people, and was one of the small minority of men in the world who decline to be led by the nose. There was nothing very smooth or polished about Rough-and-Ready, as was implied by his name; but he had a bright eye, a free manner, and a civil tongue—sufficient recommendations to Captain Liddle's good favour.

At the appointed time the Merry Andrew weighed anchor, and started for China. Joshua rubbed his hands, and thought with a light heart of his pretty Ellen and his friend Dan, and his old mother and father, and that good friend the Old Sailor. He saw himself walking along the familiar street in Stepney, and saw all the neighbours running out to greet him, and saw Ellen, his own dear little wife, fluttering into his arms, and nestling there as prettily as could be. What wonder that his face grew bright, and that he went about his work with a cheerfulness that brought a darker scowl into the face of the Lascar! This worthy had not advanced a single step towards the furtherance of the scheme to which he had in a sort of measure pledged himself to Solomon Fewster before he left Gravesend. True, he had gone on board the Merry Andrew with the vaguest of ideas as to the manner in which he should be able to carry out his intentions regarding Joshua. The fact was, that he had been only anxious to get away from England for a time; the brawl in which he had been engaged and had used his knife was a serious one, and he was frightened for his own safety. But he had played his cards cunningly with Solomon Fewster, and had succeeded in ex-

tracting money and valuables from his cowardly master; thus providing for his safety, and putting money in his purse at the same time. Joshua had kept a sharp eye upon him during the whole of the voyage, and he was compelled to be careful and wary; for he knew that Joshua was a favourite with the Captain, and that he would be clapped in irons upon the first sign of insubordination. Then he was disappointed in finding that not another sailor on board but himself owed Joshua a grudge, or was envious of him; so that he was alone in his hate until that instinctive understanding took place between him and the second mate Seadbolt, which made Joshua a mark for their mutual animosity. The Lascar would have dearly liked to do Joshua an ill turn; but he could not see his way to the accomplishment of his wish. But even from this thwarting of his desire he derived a kind of malicious satisfaction; for he could not help thinking with pleasure of the dismay and disappointment Solomon Fewster would experience when Joshua came home safe and sound. He could not help chuckling to himself as he thought, 'What a way he'll be in when the Merry Andrew gets into Blackwall, and how he'll storm and swear! But he'd better mind what he's about

with me. I owe him one for that threat of giving me into custody for stealing the things he gave me.' Certainly no such sentiment as 'Honour among thieves' found place in the breast of the Lascar.

And Minnie? She had not calculated the effect of living within herself, as she had been compelled to do. Loving Joshua as she did with all her heart and soul, she had deceived herself by believing that she would be happy if she were only in the ship with him. Happy she would have been, had he known her and spoken kindly to her; but the gulf that divided them seemed to her to be wider than it would have been had thousands of miles of ocean been between them. She had time for reflection on board ship; and reflection, although it did not turn the current of her love, nor lessen it, added to her misery. At one time during the voyage she had been so unhappy that she was almost on the point of throwing herself overboard; and indeed had she known of the marriage between Joshua and Ellen she might really have done so. Happily for her she was not aware of the marriage, and was spared the contemplated sin. But she was on a rack of love and doubt, and was truly

unhappy in the present, and despairing in the future. She went about her work in a dull mechanical way, keeping aloof from every one, and never going on deck unless her duties called her there. Mrs. Liddle saw that the poor girl was miserable, and questioned her. But here Minnie's rebellious nature came into play; she shut her heart against the proffered sympathy, and returned cold answers to her mistress's kind questions. Mrs. Liddle was sorry, but not offended; she saw that the girl was struggling with a great grief. 'A love affair, depend upon it, John,' she said to her husband; and she respected Minnie's desire not to have her confidence openly intruded upon. Minnie's behaviour on board inspired Mrs. Liddle with the conviction that her maid was a thoroughly good girl, and she could overlook a great deal in a girl who behaved so well. And notwithstanding Minnie's retired behaviour, she was an object of interest to all. The officers and sailors called her 'the shy beauty,' 'the pretty gipsy - maid,' 'the brown - faced little beauty;' and, when she came towards them with her eyes downcast, made way for her with almost as much deference as they did for the Captain's wife. But she spoke no

word to any one of them, and lived her life of self-imposed isolation in grief and silence.

The wind was fair, and a favourable voyage was anticipated. Sail after sail was clapped on, and Captain Liddle walked up and down the deck with a beaming face and in a state of high satisfaction. Five of the passengers were below in the first agonies of sea-sickness. Four were on deck—the two friends, James Heartsease and Harry Wall, Steven Homebush and Rough-and-Ready. The friends had travelled too many thousands of miles upon the ocean to be troubled by sea-sickness now; they had struggled with and vanquished that fell enemy years ago. Rough-and-Ready was not the sort of man to give in; he treated sea-sickness as he treated everything else that came to him in a threatening shape—he laughed in its face. Perhaps previous experience enabled him to do so with impunity. Steven Homebush was not so fortunate. He had a large stock of bile, and (speaking after the manner of a well-known great man) when he had got rid of a great deal, he would have a great deal left. He certainly got rid of a great deal upon this occasion; and accustomed as he was to wrestle against yearnings of the flesh and terrible foes, this foe

was too powerful for him, and this yearning of the flesh sent him into a deep pit of tribulation from which he saw no chance of escape. Some kind friend had advised him not to go below when he was attacked; and in accordance with that advice he remained on deck, possessed by a spirit so fiendish as not only to set at naught the pious exhortations of the worthy Steven, but even to change words of piety into utterances that sounded very like anathemas. Even in the midst of his agony, he looked round for some one, as was his wont in his happier moods, upon whom to pour the vials of his spleen; for Steven Homebush had this peculiar conviction with respect to himself. His invariable verdict when tribulation visited other persons was, that it was a just punishment—it was a visitation of the Lord. But there was no such acknowledgment regarding any vexation by which he was afflicted. In that case his opinion was, that he was suffering for the sins of others, and the conviction was to him a sufficient proof of his own worthiness and of the wickedness and unworthiness of every other person. He looked round for some one on whom to vent his spleen; but no person met his eye but Rough-and-Ready, whose merry face and

cheerful manner were an additional sting to the miserable Steven. Rough-and-Ready nodded encouragingly to the pale-faced Steven, who was leaning against the bulwarks, and said cheerfully, and really from no ill-natured motive,

‘You will be better by and by, Mr. Homebush. Besides, it will do you good.’

These last words were unfortunately chosen; for the afflicted Steven—who had heard the discreditable stories attached to Rough-and-Ready, and who had already judged him as a sinner of the first magnitude—glared at the speaker, and said, with difficulty, ‘Scoffer! sinner!’

He intended to add, ‘Repent!’ but a sudden paroxysm compelled him to confide that exhortation to the waves.

Rough-and-Ready laughed gaily, and turning on his heel, met the Captain, and fell into step with him.

‘Some of the sailors are grumbling,’ observed Rough-and-Ready, ‘because we have set sail on a Friday.’

‘Grumble!’ exclaimed Captain Liddle, pettishly. ‘Ay, and they’ll grumble till the end of the voyage. I have had that sort of thing occur to me before. This is the fifth time I have started

on a Friday, and nothing more unusual ever occurred than occurred at any other time. But the men wouldn't believe it, and won't believe it now. If a head-wind comes, it is because we set sail on a Friday; if we're becalmed, because we set sail on a Friday; if there's a squall, because we set sail on a Friday; if a man tumbles overboard, because we set sail on a Friday; if we lose a spar, if a sail is split, because we set sail on a Friday. I do believe, if one of them cuts his finger, he thinks, "Curse the skipper! What the something unmentionable did he set sail on a Friday for?"'

'I have no doubt, skipper,' said Rough-and-Ready, smiling and pointing to Steven Homebush, whose head was hanging over the bulwarks, as if its owner were curiously interested in the swelling of the waves, 'that Mr. Homebush is quite ready to side with the men, and to declare that he is sea-sick because you set sail on a Friday.'

Captain Liddle smiled at the pious sufferer, and shrugged his shoulders. It was evident, although he said nothing upon the subject, that he had already formed a not too favourable opinion of Steven Homebush.

For the first three days the prognostications

of the sailors, that 'something' was sure to happen because the voyage was commenced upon a Friday, did not seem likely to be realised. The weather was fine, the wind was fair, and every stitch of canvas was set. But the grumbling did not cease, and for a very good reason. Scadbolt and the Lascar did their best to keep the subject warm, and between them managed to foment and increase the dissatisfaction. Captain Liddle, cognisant of this, became stern and strict, and took but little rest. He did not know who it was that was encouraging the men; he suspected Scadbolt, and, estimating his second mate at his proper worth, he wanted but the slightest confirmation of his suspicions to take prompt action against the offender. By this time the passengers had recovered from their sea-sickness, and begun to assemble on the deck. Steven and Rachael Homebush set to work vigorously in their task of reclaiming the sinners, in which category every person but themselves on board was included; but though they prayed (for others), and groaned (for others), and 'wrestled' (for others), their efforts were not crowned with success. Indeed, the only person who tolerated them at all was the man who had the worst character, and whom nearly

everybody avoided. Rough-and-Ready was a treasure to the pious couple. To him, as the most illustrious sinner within their reach, they imparted the knowledge of their own goodness and of everybody else's wickedness ; him they informed that their special mission (out of heaven) was to lead him to the waters of grace, and that his special mission was to be led thereto by them. They prayed for him wrathfully, in stony voices, and would have wept over him, had he allowed them to do so. And when they found that they made no impression upon him (for it was only his good-nature that induced him to listen to them), they groaned the louder, and prayed the longer, and wrestled the more, because of the hardness of man's heart. It was a curious thing, seeing how good they were and how bad he was, to observe the conduct of little Emma, Mrs. Pigeon's five-year-old daughter, towards the saints and the sinner. The little child ran away from the saints, and cried and struggled when Rachael Homebush took her hand ; but when she saw the sinner, she ran into his arms with perfect confidence, and submitted to be tossed in the air and to be kissed by him very much as if she liked it. But then children have no judgment.

Towards the close of the third day the weather became threatening, and the sails were taken in. This set the grumblers at work more busily than ever. Some time before midnight, the watch being in charge of the second mate, Captain Liddle came unaware upon two of the men who were grumbling, and sternly asked them what they were grumbling at. The Lascar was one of the twain, and of course he did not reply; but the other man, being pressed by the Captain, pulled at his forelock, and said that the sailors weren't pleased because the voyage had been commenced on their unlucky day.

'And that's the cause of this rough weather, eh?' questioned Captain Liddle sarcastically.

'Yes, your honour,' was the reply. 'Why, even the second mate says so.'

'Does he?' cried Captain Liddle, turning wrathfully upon Scadbolt, who at that moment approached them. 'What do you mean, Mr. Scadbolt, by spreading dissatisfaction among the crew?'

Brought face to face with the man to whom he had spoken, Scadbolt, who was no coward, gave him a threatening look, and said,

'Well, sir, I've an objection to setting sail on

Friday; and, as you see, the men have the same objection.'

'I see quite enough to warn you to be careful,' said Captain Liddle in a determined tone; 'I have warned you before, and I warn you now for the last time. Keep your objections to yourself, sir, and trouble yourself only with your duty.—And you, men, attend to yours, and let me hear no more of this nonsense. You know me well enough to know that I will not be trifled with.'

The men slouched away, and Scadbolt was obliged to suppress his passion for the time; but it burned the fiercer for that.

The next day the weather became worse, and circumstances thus gave a colour to the dissatisfaction, which grew stronger every hour. But the Captain was equal to both emergencies; like a good sailor and a stout captain he grappled with the storm that raged without, and with that scarcely less dangerous one that raged within. He was seldom off the deck, and when he did go down to snatch an hour's rest, he left Joshua on board to watch in his place. For Captain Liddle was not slow to discover that Joshua was the man of all the other men on the ship upon whose faithfulness he could best depend. He said this many

times to his wife, and often spoke to her in praise of Joshua. Minnie heard this, and heard also of the dissatisfaction among the sailors, and how Scadbolt, the second mate, had fomented the dissatisfaction. About this time a whisper spread among the passengers that there were three or four sailors in the crew who only wanted a favourable opportunity to break into open mutiny. Confirmation of this was given by the Captain, on the third day of the bad weather, when the ship was scudding along under bare poles. He, coming down hastily into the saloon, went into his cabin, and made his appearance in a few minutes with a belt buckled round his waist and two pistols in it. The passengers, looking at each other in astonishment, received another shock presently by the surprising appearance of Rough-and-Ready. His dress hitherto had been of a respectable character—black coat and waistcoat and tweed trousers; but now he had on a red serge shirt, and a rough billycock-hat, and buckskin riding-trousers, and boots that reached half way up his thighs, and a red-silk sash round his waist, with knife and pistol stuck therein. You may guess the alarm he caused among the ladies; the only passenger who seemed pleased at the change in his appearance

was little Emma Pigeon, who skipped round him delightedly, and clapped her hands in approval of his bright-coloured shirt and sash. Rough-and-Ready caught the child in his arms and gave her a hearty kiss, and nodded cordially to the fellow-passengers who had so studiously avoided him. They were so frightened at his desperate appearance, that they forgot to frown upon him as they were wont to do. Rough-and-Ready then going on deck, walked up to Captain Liddle, and said,

‘ You can depend upon me, skipper. I’ve seen this sort of thing before.’

Captain Liddle gave him a look of grateful acknowledgment, and they made their way into the midst of a knot of sailors who were standing irresolutely about Scadbolt and Joshua. Joshua was cool but perplexed, and Scadbolt was in a furious rage.

‘ Whose watch is this?’ asked Captain Liddle. He knew well enough, but he had a motive for asking.

‘ Mine, sir,’ answered Joshua.

‘ What are the men hanging about for?’

‘ I gave an order, sir, and Mr. Scadbolt countermanded it.’

‘ Give your order again, Mr. Marvel.’

Joshua did so; and as Scadbolt, in a voice thick with passion, was desiring the men not to obey it, Captain Liddle very promptly knocked him down. Calling two of the sailors by name, Captain Liddle ordered them to put the second mate in irons. After the confusion which followed the execution of this order had partially subsided, Captain Liddle cried out,

‘Now, then, what have you to complain of? Speak out like men.’

At this one of the sailors stepped forward, and said respectfully,

‘Well, your honour, some of us think it would have been better if we had stopped in port another day.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said the Captain. ‘You have a right to yours, but I have a right to mine also, and I am master of this ship. Now I ask you, as sensible men and good sailors, is it right that you should forget your duty because we don’t agree upon a certain point? Do you know what this means, my men?’ pointing to Scadbolt. ‘It means mutiny. What would any one of you do if you were skipper in my place? You would put a stop to it at once, as I have done, and as I intend to do. I’ll do it by reason, if you’ll let me,

and I'll say nothing of any other means, for I don't want to use them. I speak you fair, men, and I mean you fair. What do you say, now, to treating me as I treat you?' Acquiescent murmurs ran round the crew, most of whom had gathered together during the scene. 'And at such a time as this too,' continued Captain Liddle, 'though it would be all the same in fair weather or foul. I'll tell you something that many of you, as good mariners, suspect already. We are near a dangerous coast—how near I do not know, for I have not been able to take a sight for two days. And it's at such a time as this that this bad sailor—I found out before we got into the Bay of Biscay that he wasn't as good as he ought to be—it's at such a time as this that he tries to get you into trouble. Come, now, have I spoke you fair?'

'Yes, you have; spoke like a man!' a dozen voices said.

'That's well said. Whoever is on my side step over to me.'

Every man—even the Lascar, too much of a coward to stand aloof—stepped to the Captain's side and saluted him.

'I'm proud of my crew,' was the Captain's simple remark after this. 'Now go to your duty.'

As the Captain walked on to the poop, Rough-and-Ready said,

‘That was well done, skipper; but there are two or three black sheep among ’em, for all that.’

‘I know it,’ replied Captain Liddle, with a significant look. ‘I shall keep a sharp look-out on them. I’ve got a man on board that’s a match for a dozen black sheep, or I’m very much mistaken.’

Rough-and-Ready laughed and turned on his heel, and Captain Liddle went down to say an encouraging word to his wife.

On the eighth day the Captain, suspecting that they were in the vicinity of the Minerva Shoal, near which there were some dangerous rocks, ordered a sharp look-out to be kept for broken water. All the passengers were by this time in a state of great alarm, and although Captain Liddle tried to cheer them by encouraging words, his anxious face belied his speech. Perhaps the one who suffered the most from terror was Steven Homebush. His terror was so great that he forgot his mission, and flew to others for consolation, instead of imparting it. Such men as he are most true to their calling when the weather is fine. It was a miserably dark night. The Captain, completely tired

out, had gone down to his cabin for a little rest. All the passengers, with the exception of Rough-and-Ready, who never seemed to sleep, and yet was the freshest man of them all, had retired to their beds with hearts filled by gloomy forebodings of what the morrow might bring; and there they lay, tossing about, listening to the raging wind that was driving them perhaps to certain death. In the Captain's cabin were Mrs. Liddle and her maid. There was something in the present danger that was to Minnie almost a relief from the horrible monotony of her life. Her self-imposed silence had become unbearable, and she fretted under it until her health was in danger of giving way. So that this change, with all its terrors and uncertainties, was an absolute relief to her. She was too sad and unhappy to be frightened at the prospect of death. Had the future held out to her any hope of happiness, she would have prayed to live; but as it was——‘Better to die,’ she thought, ‘and so end all.’ There is no doubt that this miserable state of her mind was due to the want of proper moral training in her childhood. Thrown completely upon herself; with no mother's love to teach her what is often taught by love's instinct alone, that such and such im-

pulses and thoughts are weeds that destroy, and such and such are flowers that beautify : doomed to the almost sole companionship of a father whose misfortunes had rendered him an unfit teacher, it is scarcely to be wondered at that she should have been oblivious of the true duty of life.

‘Bessie,’ said Captain Liddle to his wife, ‘I have come down for an hour’s sleep. I can rest with confidence, for Marvel is keeping the watch.’

Mrs. Liddle nodded, and gave him a sweet little smile that was like wine to him ; and Minnie heard him say, in answer to a whisper from his wife, ‘We are in God’s hands, Bessie, and must trust to His mercy.’

‘We are in God’s hands, and must trust to His mercy,’ thought Minnie as she left the cabin ; ‘and Joshua is keeping the watch. Death may be very near. Will it be wrong to speak to him ?’ Mechanically she made her way to the deck, stumbling two or three times and bruising herself. But she felt no pain. ‘I should like to die near him,’ she thought ; ‘if he would take my hand in his, I should be content and happy.’

Nothing but darkness surrounded her on deck. She clung to a rope, appalled by the mournfulness of the scene. Not a star was to be seen in the

heavens, and the sky and water were as black as the night. So solemn, so mournful was everything around, that the ship seemed to be rushing into a pit of death, where no light was. She could not see her hand before her, but all at once her heart beat wildly at the sound of Joshua's voice. He was speaking to Rough-and-Ready, and they were quite near her, although she had not seen them. Even now she could but barely discern their forms in the gloom. Joshua had just made a remark that Rough-and-Ready must have been a great traveller.

'Yes,' answered Rough-and-Ready, 'I've been about a pretty great deal. I've led a wild life; but then, you see, I never had any one to care for but myself.'

'Never?' questioned Joshua, in a tone that had a dash of pity in it.

'Never but once, and that was only for a little while. But what matters? It will be all one by and by.'

'I should be sorry to think you meant that,' continued Joshua; 'it would be a sad belief that, at such a time as this.'

'You speak as if you didn't believe it, at all events,' said Rough-and-Ready, in tones as soft as

a girl's; 'but then your circumstances are different to mine. You are young; I am——'

'Not old.'

'Old enough for twice my years. Then you have friends at home, mayhap?'

'Ay, dear ones.'

'Mother and father?'

'Ay; God bless them!'

'Wife perhaps?'

Joshua gave a gasp that sounded almost like a cry of pain.

'Ah, well,' continued Rough-and-Ready, 'if we were to go down this minute, I don't know the man or woman who would say "Poor fellow!" when my fate was known. I leave no one behind me, and my death would bring no grief to a single soul. Perhaps my condition is the happier of the two.'

'Not so,' said Joshua sadly; 'and I hope—indeed I believe—that you don't mean what you say. I have a friend at home—Dan, his name—to whom the news of my death would be the bitterest grief. I have dear ones at home, whose lives would be lives of mourning if I were not to return. I know this, and feel the pain that they would experience should it be God's will that we

are not to escape this peril. But, strange as it may sound, I would not spare them the pain if it were in my power. Could I, by a wish, destroy the memories that make my life dear to me and them—dearer than you imagine—and so pluck from their hearts and minds the sting that my death would bring to them, I would not do so. For after death, there is life !

‘ You believe in the immortality of the soul, mate ?’

‘ Surely ; and you ?’

Rough-and-Ready made no reply.

‘ ‘Tis often difficult to believe in what we don’t understand. On such a night as this—bleak, dreary, awfully solemn—with Death waiting for us within a few yards perhaps—it is difficult to believe that there are spots on the earth where the sun is shining and where the flowers are blooming.’

‘ That’s true, mate ; you speak more like a scholar than a sailor. Shake hands.’

‘ I learnt a great deal from the friend of whom I have spoken,’ said Joshua, grasping Rough-and-Ready’s hand. ‘ What is that a-head of us ?’

A dark cloud. Impossible to see whether it belonged to earth, or air, or water. A moment

after he uttered the words, the man who was keeping the look-out cried that there was land a-head. Joshua hastily gave some orders, and was making his way to the saloon to arouse the Captain, when he was almost thrown off his legs by a terrible shock. Involuntarily he threw his arms round Minnie, who was clinging to the rope. She held him fast for a moment, and he cried,

‘ Who is this ?’

‘ It is me,’ she said ; ‘ cling to me.’

‘ Don’t stir,’ he whispered rapidly, filled with a wild amazement at the familiar tones of Minnie’s voice ; ‘ if it were not that I know I am not dreaming, I could believe a spirit spoke, and not a woman. But keep you here ; do not move for your life.’

The next instant all was confusion, and cries and lamentations filled the air. Captain Liddle was on deck barefooted, and all the passengers were there in their night-dresses, clinging to ropes and spars, praying and crying and wringing their hands. Great seas washed over the ship, drowning the cries for a brief time ; the night was so dark that their true situation could not be discovered, and imagination added to their terrors and

magnified them. The Captain could do literally nothing; for the ship appeared to have been lifted on to the rocks, and kept bumping against them in its endeavours to get free. And yet there was sea all around them. Some of the passengers had sought shelter under the lee of the cuddy, among them the Captain's wife, Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon and little Emma, and Steven and Rachel Homebush. Many times during the night was the voice of Steven Homebush heard, calling upon the Lord to save *him*; while his sister Rachel, braver than he, stood by his side, with a stern set face, in silence. The cheery laugh of Mrs. Pigeon was stilled, but she was not so overcome by terror as not to be a comfort to her husband and child; during the dark night those three clung together and comforted each other as well as they were able; while the Captain, making his way from one group to another, bade them not lose heart; for the ship seemed to be keeping together, and when daylight came their condition might be found to be less desperate than it appeared.

‘Besides,’ he whispered to the male passengers, ‘we have three or four rascals among the sailors, and for the sake of the women we must keep ourselves cool and self-possessed.’

To his wife he said simply,

‘Well, Bessie, this is a bad job. I ought not to have allowed you to come with me.’

‘I would sooner be here with you, John,’ she said, kissing him, ‘than I would be at home in safety.’

‘Brave little heart,’ he whispered to himself as he walked away from her. ‘Yet I could bear it better if I were alone.’

James Heartsease and Harry Wall kept together, as friends should, all through the night. They felt not a particle of fear; they thought it was very grand and very awful, and spoke in calm tones of what the morrow might bring.

‘Don’t think we shall see China, Jim,’ said Harry.

‘Perhaps not. Hope nobody will be hurt,’ was the reply. ‘What a grand painting this would make!’

A few minutes after Joshua had left Minnie, he came to the cuddy, where Mrs. Liddle had sought protection.

‘Mr. Marvel,’ she called to him, ‘have you seen my maid?’

Then it came upon him that the woman to whom he had clung when the ship struck was the

gipsy-maid who had kept herself so reserved, and he said, 'Yes, my lady; do you want her?'

All the officers called the Captain's wife 'my lady,' and she was proud of the title.

'Yes,' she answered; 'I wish you could bring her to me, poor girl; she is friendless and unhappy, poor child!'

'Has she no friends at home, my lady?' Joshua could not help asking.

'None, I believe.'

The word 'home' reached little Emma Pigeon's ears, and as she nestled in her mother's arms, the child cried, 'Mother, are we going home?'

'Yes, yes, my dear,' sobbed Mrs. Pigeon; 'try to go to sleep, there's a darling.' And she rocked the child, and sang a little song about birds and angels.

Joshua, steadying himself as he walked cautiously to where Minnie was standing, wondered to himself whether it was fancy that had made the gipsy-maid's voice sound so familiar to him; a sea washing over the deck drenched him to the skin, and as he stood upright and shook the water from his clothes, the memories that were stirred within him brought to him a picture of the dear old kitchen at Stepney, with himself, half-naked, barefooted, and with the water streaming from

him, standing at the door. The vision may have occupied but a moment, but the picture was complete; father, mother, Ellen, Dan and the birds, the Old Sailor, all were there. But where was Minnie? Why, by his side, with short curly hair and brown gipsy-face. 'Am I mad?' he exclaimed, as he dashed the waters from his eyes. But when he reached the spot where Minnie stood, and she clasped his hand and said, 'Thank God, you are safe!' his amazement grew.

'I cannot see your face,' he whispered, with his arm round her, for the better protection of both; 'but your voice is strangely familiar to me. Do I know you?'

'Yes. But do not press me farther. Wait till the light comes. Shall we live till then?'

'I hope so.'

'Will you promise me to keep near me till daylight comes? It is my dearest wish — my only one.'

'I promise,' he said, strangely agitated, 'until my duty calls me away.'

'And even then you will come back when you have done your task, and stand by my side?'

'I will, my poor girl. I have come now to bring you to the Captain's lady.'

‘ She sent you for me ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ She is a good lady. But wait a little ; I have something to say first.’ Many moments passed before she spoke again, and in the pause a grateful prayer went up from the girl’s heart even for the small blessing of gentle speech from her hero’s lips. ‘ You have made me very, very happy. Until to-night—for many, many months past—I have been most unhappy.’ She bent her lips to his hand and kissed it. ‘ Now answer me. We are in great peril ?’

‘ The greatest, I fear.’

‘ But a danger threatens you of which you are not aware. Listen. The second-mate, he who was put in irons the other day—’

‘ Scadbolt—go on.’

‘ Is loosed.’

‘ By whom ?’

‘ I don’t know. But he is loosed, and but five minutes since was near me with a sailor whom I think I know, although I could not see him. Listen. I must whisper, for he may be near us now. They were talking of you, and they swore—O, my God !—they swore to have your life.’

‘ They spoke of me by name ?’

‘By name—Joshua Marvel.’

‘You think you know the sailor who was talking to Scadbolt. Is he a dark man?’

‘Yes; a Lascar, I think.’

‘You are right. He owes me an old grudge.’

‘Scadbolt said that this coast is one of the most dangerous upon which a ship could strike. He believes he knows pretty well where we are, and that it will be a fight for the boats—’

‘We have only two, the jolly boat and the long boat; he may be right.’

‘Be on your guard; tell the Captain; be prepared.’

‘We will; and you—’

‘I can protect myself. Feel this.’

‘A knife!’

‘I picked it up. Let them beware.’

Another lurch of the vessel made them cling closer to each other. During all the horror of the scene, Joshua had not dared to ask whether it really was Minnie to whom he was speaking; he feared to know the truth. Minnie on the ship with him! and Ellen at home—and Dan—he dared not think of it.

‘Come,’ he said; ‘I will take you to the Captain’s lady. Cling fast to me.’

‘ Say a few words to me.’

‘ What are they?’

‘ God bless and forgive you.’

‘ God bless and forgive you ! From my heart.’

‘ He will, I think,’ said the girl, as if communing with herself. ‘ I have not felt so happy for a long time past. Death has no terror for me, if you are kind !’

END OF VOL. II.

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